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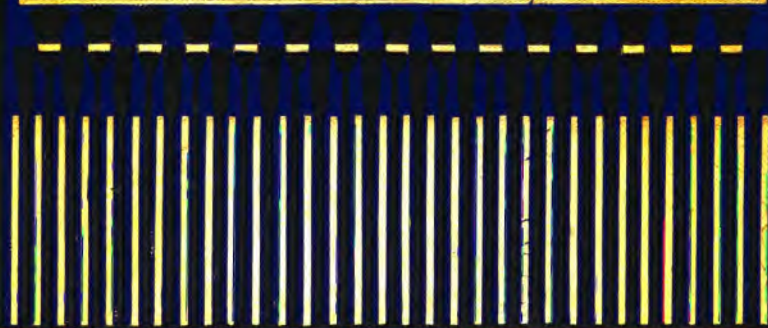
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MELISSA'S VICTORY

BY
ASHTON NEILL



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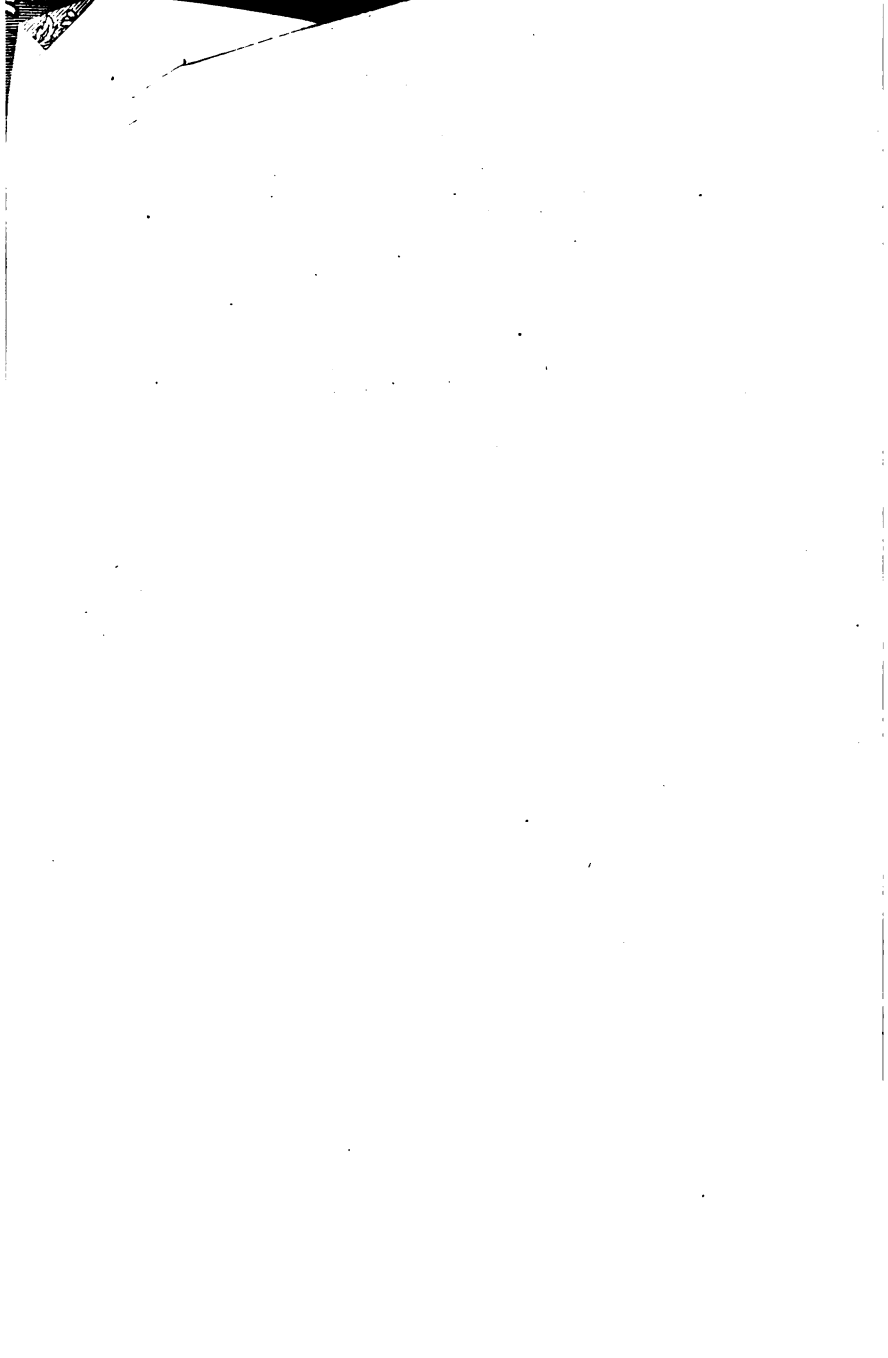


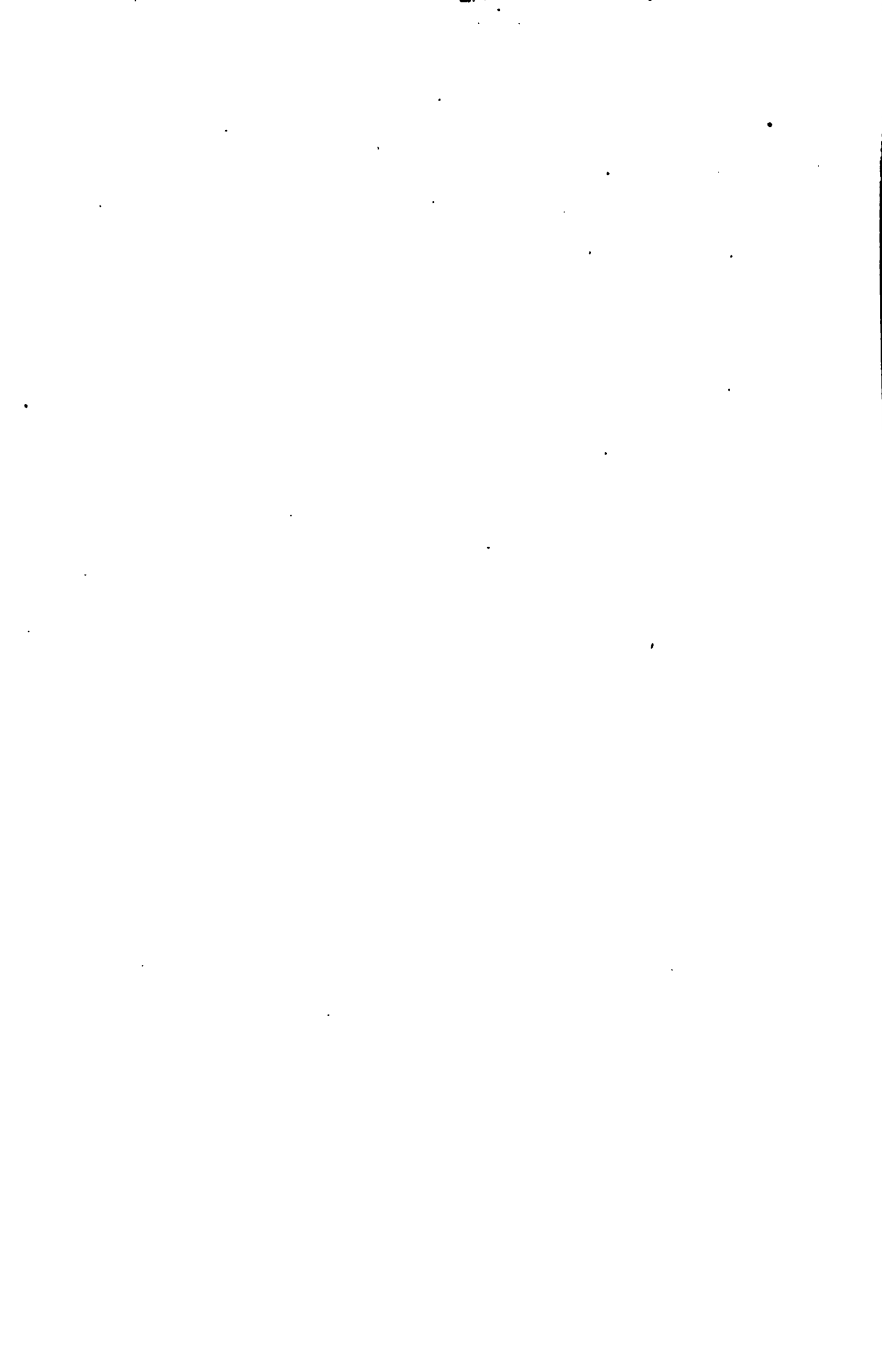


MELISSA'S VICTORY.









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BY

ASHTON NEILL.

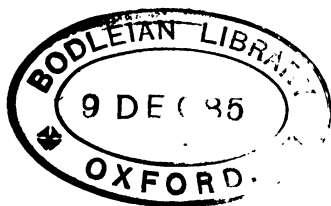
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Not "Go to a Methodist Chapel"
 Why, no respectable people go there

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MELISSA'S VICTORY.



BY

ASHTON NEILL.


ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. GUNSTON.



MELISSA'S VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE "UNCOMFORTABLE SERMON."

NE fair summer's evening, in an early part of the present century, three well-dressed girls were walking together along the banks of the canal that skirted one side of the little town of Castleton. They were chattering so fast that the eldest, unobserved by her companions, led the way across a bridge and past some cottages until they found themselves in one of the back streets of an evidently low neighbourhood. Squalid children were at play; slatternly shrill-voiced women were gossiping, with arms akimbo, at their doors; whilst a noisy public-house near seemed to have absorbed many of the male population.

Mattie Houghton, the smartest of the girls, now exclaimed: "Why, Betsy, we have taken the wrong turning, and are in the town again! What a horrid, dirty place! How can any one live here?"

"Some people have to, it seems. And it was the right turning for *me*," replied Betsy, as she stopped outside a plainly-built chapel. Then, addressing her other companion—a brown-haired, blue-eyed girl of seventeen, with a bright, gentle expression: "Do come in, Lissie," she said; "I should so like you to hear our preacher."

"Go to a Methodist chapel! Why, no respectable people go there. Oh, dear! I am sorry; I quite forgot that you attend it now. And does your mother really let you?"

"All right, Lissie; don't apologise. Yes, she gave her consent at last, because she found that I was a better girl at home for going there—at least, she said I was. And as for our not being respectable, we are as much so as the fisher-folk of Galilee, are we not? As for our worship, Lissie, come and see for yourself what it is like."

Melissa, or, as she was generally called, Lissie Deane, hesitated. She had lately heard much of the people called Methodists, and had been greatly impressed by Betsy Blyth's account of her own conversion, which had been elicited from her by Lissie's inquiry as to the cause of her altered conduct and demeanour. For the despotic, self-willed girl, whom all in her own circle feared, and conciliated from fear alone, had sud-

denly become gentle and unselfish, although still the master spirit at home and in company. And, whilst many of Betsy's young friends had jeered at her new-fangled notions—though they appreciated the change these had caused in her—Lissie had secretly pondered on the subject, and wondered whether these despised notions would help her to be good also.

Now, as she stood outside the chapel, hesitating between curious interest and pride, Mattie put in her word, exclaiming with decision: "Go, if you like, Lissie; I shall not. People who do what is not respectable never get on, you know. I am quite sorry that Betsy has taken to go to such a place. You had both better follow my advice, and come for a walk."

Betsy's eyes flashed. "And is not the right respectable?" she retorted. "Always do that, and you are safe to get on, Mattie."

"Well, wilful folk must 'gang their ain gate,'" said that young lady, not choosing to notice Betsy's last remark. "And if you won't come with me, then good bye, Lissie; for I cannot waste this beautiful evening in talking." So Mattie walked gracefully away in the direction of the fields, looking very elegant in her pretty pelisse and Leghorn hat.

"There," exclaimed Betsy, as she looked after her, "she's soon got rid of! And I did not say that the right always gets on in *this* world. But Mattie will always swim with the tide. Now, Lissie, come in, just to please me; there will be time enough for a walk afterwards. Come along!" And, suiting the action

to the word, Betsy took the arm of her still irresolute companion, and they entered the chapel together.

Melissa's first impressions were those of mingled surprise and amusement. For, accustomed as she was to the Gothic architecture of the fine old parish church, to its sober ritual, and well-dressed congregation, the white-washed walls, plain windows, and high galleries now before her seemed painfully un-ecclesiastical. Then, too, most of the people there were so shabby! She herself sat next to a dirtily-dressed mechanic, who smelt strongly of leather; and she was constantly startled by sudden and general "Amens!" and "Hallelujahs!" during the prayer. Then the singing! Here was no organ rolling forth its deep diapason, or modulating into soft, sweet strains; no white-robed, melodious choristers; but the whole congregation sang, and that heartily. Indeed, it seemed to Melissa that they must have thought the Almighty very far off, and that it was therefore necessary to shout their praises to Him—almost their prayers too! Altogether she felt at first rather shocked at the service, and concluded that the Methodists certainly were *not* respectable.

She had become rather restless, and was wishing that she had followed Mattie's instead of Betsy's advice, when a sudden hush in the congregation renewed her interest. The preacher was announcing the text, and all eyes were fixed upon him. He was an old man with white hair, a benignant expression, and an impressive delivery. To Melissa, at least, his text was a

singular one—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And her arrested attention was retained.

Surely the preacher must have known her, and all about her, too, though how, she could not imagine, for he was quite a stranger to her. Nevertheless, it seemed that her most subtle feelings, and latent passions, as well as her actual sins—wilful or unintentional—were vigorously and vividly painted, and held forth to view. And a pretty picture they made! Melissa had no idea that she had been, in her past life, so naughty—who *could* have told the minister about it? Then, too, her good deeds and dispositions—acts and qualities on which she prided herself—were as ruthlessly analysed and depicted by him; and lo! they were all tainted with the leprosy of sin—even her prayers! Well might the preacher, in tones that thrilled her, cry, "Unclean, unclean!"

Melissa felt quite unhappy, and yet half offended. She was sure that her parents would say that she was good, but then, they did not know one half her naughty thoughts and feelings, and if a stranger had so accurately guessed them—it must have been a guess—how evident they must be to the Omniscient One?

The first part of the sermon Melissa quite understood, but the latter half which told of the new birth, the renewed heart, the changed life, and the joy and peace of believing, both puzzled and pained

her. She looked round as some of the elder folk in the congregation ejaculated "Bless the Lord!" "The Lord be praised!" "Ay, ay, that's true!" and was surprised to see how happy they looked. That lame old woman near, with the large nose and nutcracker chin, who had irresistibly reminded her of "Mother Hubbard," why, now, as she looked up at the preacher, her face seemed almost beautiful with the happy light that shone through it. Melissa was sure she had nothing in *this* world to make her happy, for she was poor, old, and feeble. Yet she was so; there was no mistaking that.

To complete Melissa's discomfort, the preacher concluded his sermon with a glowing description of heaven; and spoke so confidently of it as being the destined home of many present, and so sadly of those whose sins would shut them out of it, that she was quite miserable, and a little alarmed. Was *she* sure to live with God for ever after death? Without holiness none could see the Lord, and, somehow, she had never felt so wicked before—and consequently never so cross.

Upon leaving the chapel, the two girls walked down the street towards the canal, and Betsy eagerly inquired, "Well, Lissie, and what do you think of our service now?"

"Indeed, I can't say that I like it, Betsy. Such noisy singing, and dirty people, and such an uncomfortable sermon! Do your clergymen always preach like that?"

. "Yes," replied Betsy, with a keen look at her friend, and not at all offended at the rather injured tone in which she spoke; "Yes, you have had a fair sample of the sermons we are accustomed to. But we call our preachers, ministers, not clergymen or priests."

"Well, I would rather go to church. And—don't be vexed, Betsy—but, certainly, the people who go there are twice as respectable as those I saw to-night. I wonder you like to mix with such."

"It is a mercy the Lord looks at the heart, and not at the dress, Lissie. Did you see that lame woman, who sat in a side pew near us?"

"Yes, I did."

"She lives mostly upon charity, and cannot last long, for she has had two paralytic seizures, and the next will, most likely, prove fatal. Yet she did not look particularly miserable when Mr. Brown was speaking of death and of heaven, did she?"

"No, and I couldn't think how talking about death could make her look so happy, it mostly gives people the 'blues,' you know."

"Not speaking of that and heaven together, Lissie. Well, her name is Susan Huxterby; and poor, old, and ignorant as she is, she is yet one of my dearest friends. For she is rich in faith; afflicted, yet bright; strong in patience, and yet so sweet and humble. I *do* love her. Now, shall we turn into the meadows? and then we can watch the sunset, and gather the forget-me-nots and daisies. I shall take some to

Susan as I pass her house ; she is so fond of what she calls the ' bairns' flowers.'"

The girls by this time had reached a bridge, from which you might either turn into the canal meadows or towards the town along a small wharf lined with barges. But Melissa did not want to go for a walk ; she felt restless and out of humour, and blamed Betsy as the cause of her feeling thus, by having induced her to hear "that sermon." She therefore declined her friend's request, saying that her mother might want her at home.

Betsy knew that Lissie was thoughtful for others, and was not, therefore, surprised at her decision. So they parted. The former, as she walked by the cool river-side, dwelt rather disappointedly upon Lissie's unqualified disapproval of what was to herself so refreshing and delightful, and grieved that "that *beautiful* sermon" seemed to have made no impression whatever upon her. And she had secretly hoped so much from it.

As for Melissa, she soon reached her home in High Street, and quickly found that no particular work was in hand requiring her assistance. So she had a good romp in the garden with her brother and sister, to cheer herself up—for those were not the days of croquet and lawn tennis—and then, after a light supper of milk and furmenty, went to rest, laughing and chatting merrily. Her elder sister had been in bed, however, for more than half an hour, when she sat up in surprise to discover why it was that Lissie

was not yet undressed. And she found her sitting upon the floor, with the candle upon a chair, diligently reading some book. She supposed it to be a novel, and laughingly threatened to tell their mother if it were not put down at once. So Melissa closed the Bible, and did not tell her sister that she had been reading and puzzling over the third chapter in the Gospel of St. John.





CHAPTER II.

TEA IS KEPT WAITING.

CHRISTMAS was near, and was coming in good orthodox style, scattering snow from his garments and freezing lake and pond with his icy breath. The Castleton bells were clanging a noisy welcome to him in changeful chime and merry peal from the old church in High Street, when, in the darkening twilight, Ralph Deane and his school-fellows rushed forth, shouting and hurraing, from the grammar school near. And it seemed to him the happiest breaking-up that he had ever known. For was he not carrying home the three principal prizes? and had not the head master, as he presented them, praised him for his cleverness, diligence, and manliness, and expressed regret that he was leaving school? Surely now his father would allow him to go to college, and thus, in due time, he might fulfil his mother's cherished wish of becoming a clergyman. Ralph was pleased with this bright

prospect as much for her sake as for his own—the affection between the grave, reticent mother and her frank, genial son being deep and strong.

As he reached the churchyard, which opened into the street, he shouted a general “good-bye” to his companions, passed through the market-place, and burst excitedly into his father’s shop. The old clerk looked up in mild surprise as Ralph dashed past his desk, and the shopmen, who were busy recommending and selling cloth and other woollen goods, glanced at him with a smile, evidently aware that he was leaving school with honour, and as evidently pleased to know it. Upon reaching the adjoining parlour, the lad flung down his cap, shook the snow from his coat, half-carelessly, half-mischievously upon the hearth-rug, threw his precious volumes upon the table, himself into an armchair, and exclaimed:—“Hurrah for the holidays! Hurrah for Christmas! I say, mother, what jolly fires you keep. This looks something like home.” And he proceeded to warm his hands at the welcome blaze.

Mrs. Deane, a dark-haired, dignified matron, who was sitting by the table sewing, had looked up as her son entered, and had taken in his mental condition at a glance. She now quickly remarked, “Ralph, get up and shut the door after you.” And he promptly and quietly obeyed her.

Upon his entrance, his sisters, Mary and Melissa, had both looked as though they longed to jump

up and overwhelm him with questions, but habit kept them quiet and industrious—for a few minutes, at least. Then, however, the sight of the handsome books proved irresistible to Melissa. First, she glanced wistfully at her mother, who did not appear to observe her, and then left the window-seat, where she had been trying her eyes over some fine hemming, came to the table, and began eagerly to examine her brother's prizes. "Oh, Ralph!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you have gained all these! How clever you must be! Mother, why are there no grammar schools for girls, I wonder?"

Ralph laughed heartily as he joined her at the table. "Oh, my!" he said, "wouldn't there be a lot of talking in them, and no end of giggle! Fancy girls learning Greek and mathematics! What good would it do them when they were married?"

Melissa appeared to consider this a question requiring thought, and she resumed her sewing.

"That is right, my daughter," said Mrs. Deane; "learn that well which you know you should learn, and keep to the old ways. They are always the best."

"But," quickly replied Mary, who resembled her mother in feature and expression, "I suppose the old ways were once new. And I think it must be nice to know something of all that is taught."

Now Mrs. Deane never argued with her chil-

dren; she therefore took no notice of Mary's remark, but observed, "Move your work, Mary; here is Molly coming with the tea-tray. Ralph, put your books back; your father will be very pleased to see them, I am sure."

Ralph smiled as he threw himself upon the hearth-rug, and began to examine the engravings in one of the volumes. He knew that this was his mother's conscientiously-cautious way of expressing her own pleasure, and he was satisfied.

The table had been spread, and Molly, who looked very comely and comfortable in her mob-cap and ample neckerchief, had returned to her own domains, when, upon looking round, Master Ralph—whose hunger had been re-excited by the rattle of the tea-things—became aware of something unusual in the appearance of the evening meal. Not only did he behold the best urn, and the company tea-service of Worcester china on the damask cloth, but company dainties also, very tempting to a hungry school-boy, such as buttered currant cake, muffins, tartlets, and cheese cakes, to say nothing of little glass dishes filled with orange marmalade and his favourite strawberry jam.

"Why, mother!" he exclaimed, as he came promptly upon his feet, "whom are you expecting?"

Mrs. Deane looked up from her easy chair and her knitting, which she had taken up to occupy

a few spare moments, and, with a twinkle of the eye, replied, "I am expecting your father at present, Ralph, but when I ordered tea I was expecting some one else."

The lad's face flushed with pleasure, and mother and son exchanged looks of affection. Then—"What a good mother it is," he cried, immediately beginning to march pompously up and down, and to whistle "See the Conquering Hero comes," which made the two girls laugh. Mrs. Deane herself smiled, but quickly interrupted the mirth by observing, "Ralph, how often have I told you not to whistle indoors? Mary, remove the urn from the table—you had better stand it inside the fender. The tea will be cold if your father does not soon come home."

Mary at once rose, folded, and put away into the work-basket the shirt which she had been stitching, and then, glancing anxiously at the tall clock in the corner, exclaimed, "What *can* make father so late? And he dislikes cold tea as much as any old woman."

"I shall tell him that he has changed my breaking-up treat into a penalty," said Ralph, in a comically-aggrieved tone, seating himself, as he spoke, ostentatiously right in front of the table. "Behold me, compelled to gaze upon the good things, and yet to refrain from them. Mother, I'm so hungry! Mayn't we begin tea now?"

His sisters looked surprised at this proposal, and

privately decided that Ralph must be almost starving. For, though well aware that their mother governed the house in reality, they knew equally well that the most scrupulous respect was both rendered and enforced by her to their father. But before Mrs. Deane could reply to her son's audacious proposal—and he was in the habit of doing and saying things which no one else dared do—he gleefully exclaimed: “Oh, here comes father; that's his step in the passage, I'm sure! Don't those cheese-cakes look good! No one can make them so nicely as you, mother. Father, isn't it jolly? We've broken up, and I've come off with the three best prizes, and—— Oh, father! what is the matter? Are you ill?” And Ralph sprang to put him a chair.

Mr. Deane, an easy-looking man, with kind blue eyes and an open countenance, sank into the seat placed for him, and with one look at his wife, bowed his head upon the table in silence.

His children, mute and mystified, maintained their first attitude of surprise, and Mrs. Deane, too, was, for a moment, speechless. She had seen from the despair in her husband's white countenance that some calamity of vital importance had occurred—what, she could not imagine. But soon a stormy light flashed into her usually tranquil eyes, and the colour left her own cheeks, as though she also had quailed before the truth. Yet but a minute had passed since Mr. Deane's entrance, before she was leaning over him, with her hand laid upon his

shoulder. "Dear William," she said, soothingly "don't vex so—it might have been worse."

He looked up at her in astonishment. "Worse!" he echoed. "Do you know that we are ruined—bankrupt! Bad news flies fast indeed! Who had told you?"

"No one; but, remember, I advised you not to be one of them who are sureties for debts, for that he who hateth suretiship is sure."

"Ay, I recollect *now* that you told me so. If I had but taken your advice! Yet Biggs was in sad trouble, and he seemed quite trustworthy. I had known him for years; no one could have anticipated this." And Mr. Deane groaned.

"Dear husband, you did *not* know him; there was the mischief. But are you sure the trouble is so serious?"

"It is too true, Elizabeth, too true. The fellow has smashed and absconded. But what better could I expect? Isn't he one of those smooth-tongued hypocrites—those Ranters—those Methodists? Fool that I was to trust him!"

Mrs. Deane looked scandalised at her husband's speaking thus of himself before his children, and she changed the subject.

"Come, William," she said, gently, "trouble is ill met fasting. You will be all the better for a cup of tea. Mary, take up the urn." Then, seeing that her husband did not seem inclined to rouse himself—"William," she continued, "it might have

been worse. Thank God, the trouble is not that of bereavement."

Mr. Deane, however, could not be comforted. "Poor Hester," he exclaimed, "how shall we get her cured? No London doctor for her *now*. Poor people can afford neither to get ill nor well."

"Nay; Hester may have a better chance without the doctor," persisted Mrs. Deane, as she took her seat at the table. "She has never been so well since she was bled and blistered last autumn. Come, my dear, we are all waiting, and the tea is still nice and hot. It is the breaking-up feast for Ralph, you see—a home reward for diligence in his studies."

"Ah! poor boy, I fear I have spoilt your treat for you," said Mr. Deane, as he roused himself and took the cup of tea that was offered him.

"Oh, never mind me, father," said Ralph, seating himself by the side of his disconsolate parent. "And don't fret, please. It isn't as though we were all little ones, you know. We shall only have to work rather sooner and harder to make you and mother comfortable; and I have read 'that to be dispirited is to be beaten and discomfited'—so don't fret. If money is lost, money can be earned again, and we will all help and not hinder you."

"Yes; so don't trouble, father—at any rate, about us children," chimed in Melissa, from the opposite side of the table. "Mary and I can get money—indeed, we can! You don't know how clever we

are with the needle, and—and—*please* don't trouble about us, father."

Mr. Deane drew his hand over his eyes to clear away the mist that dimmed them. What is so precious as the sympathy of children? Ignorant as they are of life's evil, they yet possess its greatest power and its best wisdom in their simple, single-hearted love. They invigorate us by their affection, and touch us by their innocence into renewed effort for their sake. And out of self there is always strength.

Mr. Deane shook his head at the young, eager faces before him, but smiled as he replied, "Ah, my bairns, a life's savings are not so easily replaced. But your mother is right as usual. We are poor, but not ruined, for we still have health, love, and life."

"And hope, too, father," remarked the hitherto silent Mary, looking at him with brown, steadfast eyes that expressed quite as much determination as sanguineness of disposition. "Now, presently, you will look at Ralph's prizes, and hear what his master said of him, won't you?"

The momentary gleam of comfort, however, was not to be renewed. Mr. Deane in vain tried to appear cheerful, and to force down some of the dainties before him—sweet tooth as he was. The sight of his wife and children caused him the most poignant grief, and before long he rose abruptly and went upstairs. There they heard him walking

to and fro in his chamber overhead, and even Ralph could eat but little.

Mrs. Deane looked gloomily calm. Tea was soon over, and then she stood by her tall, high-backed chair, silent and thoughtful. Presently—"I must learn the particulars of this affair," she said. "Melissa, don't look sentimental; Mary, stir the fire, and make some fresh tea for the shopmen. Tidy the table, and let all—yourselves included—appear the same as usual. Ralph, you will go and mind the shop. There, I believe I am getting an old woman," and she laughed in a catching, hysterical way, "but the sound of your father's footsteps makes me nervous. I will go to him."

Presently all was hushed upstairs, except the low sound of voices; and then the children looked at each other with such sad faces that they appeared years older than before.

"Oh, Ralph," said Melissa, wiping the tears from her eyes, "now you won't be able to go to college, and so you can't be a clergyman!"

"Don't tell him that now, child," exclaimed Mary, impatiently. "For my part, I shall be glad when I know what is going to be done, and then we can set to and do it."

"I declare mother has forgotten poor Hester all this time, worrying about father so. Why, she will be almost famished."

"Hester had her tea long since, Ralph; but she will be alone too long. Lissie, you had better take

your work and sit with her, and carry up Ralph's books for her to look at. Now, mind and keep the trouble out of your face."

"Of course;" rejoined her sister, with some spirit. "I knew that before."

"I beg your pardon, Lissie; but *I* should find it hard work to do so."

Melissa was mollified at once, and kissing Mary before she left, she said earnestly, "Oh, we must never quarrel now, but love each other twice as much as before, and try hard to help dear father and mother."

"She's about right," observed Mary. "Trouble either binds or breaks a family—which, I suppose depends upon how it is taken. Now, be off into the shop, Ralph; I expect young Roberts will think that he ought to have something extra for his tea, after waiting so long for it. So it is a mercy he has." And then Mary seated herself behind the urn, and began to pour out tea for the expectant and now half-famished assistants, in right womanly fashion.





CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER SERMON.



YEAR had passed since Mr. Deane had failed in consequence of being surety for a fellow tradesman, who, when he perceived that his affairs were in a hopeless condition, had provided for himself with a prudence and forethought which would have been better employed in preventing the ruin of one who had proved himself a friend in need.

With the wreck of his means, and partly through the kindness of creditors, who appreciated his integrity and pitied his misfortune, Mr. Deane was enabled again to set up in business, though in a smaller way, and in a back street. For in those days, a tradesman did not emerge from a state of bankruptcy to become more flourishing than ever before.

The young Deanes, with the buoyancy of youth, soon regained their natural spirits, and adapted

themselves to their altered circumstances and mode of living more easily than did their parents. Mary was engaged in the millinery, and bid fair to work into a good connection; whilst Melissa assisted both her and Mrs. Deane in the care of the house and business.

And what of Ralph? Why, for the last two months he had been at College. True, only as a sizar; but his mother had carried her point. For she it was who had determined that he should go, and she would have worked her fingers to the bone rather than that her cherished scheme should have been abandoned. And to all objections to their poverty and lower status in society she had replied that they both afforded the best possible reasons why the only son should strive to redeem their position, as well as provide suitably for his own future.

Poor Mr. Deane had not yet recovered from the shock of his friend's treachery. For this, inasmuch as it touched his spirit, injured him far more than the poverty resulting from it. He constantly reproached himself for what he now considered a culpable trustfulness. The warm-hearted, genial man became dejected and cynical, whilst the very mention of the name Methodist elicited from him quite a burst of invective against that still despised sect, for it represented to him all that was treacherous and hypocritical—his false friend having belonged to it. And so, for the time, even poor Hester, the invalid, was more the

stay of the family than was the master of the house. Seldom free from the suffering caused by spinal disease, she was yet generally so cheerful, that the daily sight of her sweet patience and buoyant trustfulness sustained her mother's courage, and sometimes silently reproved her father into a brighter mood.

And now we wonder if the impression made upon Melissa by her visit to the Methodist chapel had faded into forgetfulness? Had family troubles erased it from her mind, or had they branded it deeper therein? Let us see for ourselves.

It was a cold night in January. The stars sparkled with a keen brilliancy in the dark dome above, and footsteps and voices in the street sounded unusually distinct through the clear frosty air. In the open space by the chapel before mentioned, and within its shadow, there stood a young girl, cloaked and closely veiled. "Shall I go in?" she thought, "They all think at home that I have gone to spend an hour or two with Mattie Houghton. Mother likes me to associate with her because her father is getting rich, and she likes us to keep all our old friends. But I don't like Mattie. She has such strange notions about right and wrong. Anything expedient *is* right to her, I believe. Somehow, I never enjoy prayer or reading the Bible so much after I have been in her company. Oh, if I only had someone to speak to! Betsy Blythe is gone now, and I can tell no one at home what I feel and think; they would be sure to say that I had Methodist notions. Yet, I am so

wretched; and the more I pray and read, the worse I feel. And, try as hard as I may, I can't be good; I am like the leper, unclean—and I cannot find the Saviour. What must I do? Lord, do Thou show me. None else can."

A burst of singing now came from within the chapel, and these words, sung to a wild and plaintive air, fell distinctly upon Melissa's ears—

"All ye that pass by
To Jesus draw nigh."—

The rest of the verse she could not distinguish, but she had heard enough.

"I *will* go in," she determined. "I will draw nigh to Jesus. It is here that I have learnt most about Him, and here I may learn more. Come what may I cannot help it—I *must* go in."

Accordingly she entered the lobby, found it empty, and then stole into the chapel, which was crowded; and as she could find no seat, she began to feel a little confused. However, an old woman in a coal-scuttle bonnet—out of whose depths peered forth two sharp grey eyes—rather fussily made room for her upon one of the benches in the aisle provided for the overplus of worshippers, and a working man handed her a hymn-book, which she declined by a shake of the head, and still kept her veil down. This touch of mystery excited the dame's curiosity. At each interval between the verses she looked Melissa well up and down, and as the congregation seated themselves

at the conclusion of the hymn, she finally took a pinch of snuff, and stuck her head on one side with a very knowing air.

But Melissa did not observe this; she had become lost to all externals in the emotion of the hour. Now, she cared nothing about her proximity to people who were not respectable, and not all over clean. She cared nothing for the bare walls, the loud singing, the running comment upon the minister's prayer—all so opposite to the refinement and decorum of church-worship; she only heard the minister himself. And to her he was an ambassador from Christ, pleading and remonstrating with her, comforting and enlightening. It seemed, as he prayed, as though her own doubts, fears, hopes, and her dumb yearnings for pardon and for purity were all told to God by him, until her soul was borne to the feet of her Father, in silent waiting for a promised blessing.

During the sermon that followed, the congregation were at first quietly attentive. The preacher—this time a young man—commenced in a calm, self-restrained manner, but as he became possessed by his subject—God's love to man in the sacrifice of Christ—the earnestness of his convictions, his passionate desire that all who sat chained in the outer darkness of sin and unbelief might step forth into the light and liberty of faith and love—in fine, all the energy of a renewed heart and quickened brain, strove into utterance in his every look, tone, and gesture.

Soon the people became thoroughly *en rapport*

with their preacher. Some sighed and wept ; some rejoiced ; and others sat silently and eagerly listening, as though they heard a revelation from their Creator. Amongst these was Melissa.

At length, as the grand old way of salvation was declared in the grand old Bible words, suddenly and sweetly the Spirit revealed to her the Saviour whom she sought, and she realized with an intense, absorbing consciousness, the presence of the pure and pitying Lord, who whispered to her—"Go in peace and sin no more."

And she *was* at peace. It seemed as though she had clasped the hand of Jesus, had met His wondrous love-compelling gaze, and that henceforth she must, if need be, leave all and follow Him. She felt, too, that she should ever love that house of God, and those worshippers, where and amongst whom the Lord Jehovah had revealed Himself to her.

After the benediction was pronounced, a prayer-meeting was at once commenced, to which many remained, but Melissa hastily left—her neighbour close behind her. The latter, as she came up, accosted her with—"A fine night, Miss."

Melissa bent her head and murmured, "Yes, very;" at the same time quickening her pace.

"*Eh !* what a fine sermon it was," continued the dame, keeping up with her. "So searching and experimental ! Doubtless, it will be made precious to the souls of many. There will be a great ingathering to-night."

"Yes," assented her unwilling listener. "Good night," and turning abruptly as they reached the end of the canal bridge Melissa was soon over the stile and in the meadows.

"What *did* that old woman mean by following me? I fancy I know that voice; is mine known too, I wonder?" Disquieted at the idea—for she, as yet, dreaded that her chapel-going should be discovered—Melissa walked quickly along the familiar path, but stopped presently to take in the soothing influences of the scene. The town, with its quaint church tower just visible above the houses, lay in dark outline before her. On one side of the canal the landscape—but thinly wooded, and with here and there a group of gaunt-looking poplars that marked some quiet homestead—stretched wide and level to the far distant horizon. On the other, a more undulating country, adorned by the occasional church spire of some tree-belted village, gradually rose to the swell of the Wolds. Above Melissa were the solemn heavens; at her feet the flowing water, the murmur of which mingled with the sough of the wind; and over all was shed the subdued light of the sparkling stars. She felt alone with God; and as she looked into the horizon it seemed not earth and sky, but the threshold of Eternity, between herself and which there lay but a tract of time; and this once traversed, the silence and the mystery would be lost in heaven's outburst of radiance and song. That heaven was her's even now—her home

and heritage. Melissa knew it, for she felt the Father's forgiveness, the Saviour's blessing, and the strength and enlightenment of the Comforter.

What step should she take next in this matter? Now Melissa felt neither doubtful nor perplexed; the timid girl, whose strong home affections had hitherto constrained her to secrecy, hesitated no longer as to her course of action. Not for worlds would she grieve her dear Saviour, her loving Father, by deception. She would tell her parents all: tell them that night. And as she turned and retraced her steps towards the town, the stars smiled on her like angel eyes; and the rustling sigh of a sudden breeze over the calm, dark fields, seemed to whisper from beyond the horizon, and to whisper—"Peace!"





CHAPTER IV.

CONFESSION.

UPON reaching home Melissa went at once to her chamber, quickly put away her bonnet and cloak, and then, with one silent prayer for strength and wisdom to do the right in a right way, she descended to the sitting-room. This apartment was low, small and shabby, but a noble fire threw a kindly glow over all, and in its ruddy light the faded carpet, curtains and table-cover, and the second-hand furniture, looked far better than in the cold, merciless daylight.

To Melissa's great relief she perceived that her father was absent, and that her mother and sisters were all quietly occupied. Her long absence had not then been noticed. Hester, a haggard but sweet-looking girl, was lying on the sofa, which had been wheeled sufficiently near to the fire to allow her to bask in its blaze. She was reading a letter from

Ralph, and looked very happy. Mary was sitting at the table with a medley of silks, ribbons, and laces before her, intent upon putting the finishing touches to a bonnet; and Mrs. Deane occupied her usual chair by the fire. She was sewing away as if for the dear life: had the perusal of her son's letter given an impetus to her needle?

All looked up as Melissa entered. "Oh, I am so glad you are come," exclaimed Hester; "there is a letter from our Ralph; and, do you know, he is winning golden opinions already, Lissie? He has found, too, a kind friend in a Mr. Vicars, a man of both wealth and influence, who seems to have taken quite a fancy to him. Isn't it good news, mother?"

"Yes; Ralph is sure to get on; there is no doubt but that *he* will bring credit to the family."

Melissa coloured. What did her mother mean? There was no telling from her face, which, as usual, hid rather than expressed feeling. So, after one glance at it, Melissa turned to Hester, and, kneeling at her side said, "May I read the letter? And how do you feel now, dear?"

"Oh, so much better!" said the invalid, brightly, as she gave up the long, closely-written epistle. "It really seems as though we should be prosperous again. Mary and you are getting into quite a good business; and when father and mother are too old to work, then Ralph will have a nice home for them. Isn't that a pleasant thought?"

"But he may have scarcely enough to maintain himself," replied the matter-of-fact Mary, as she gave the required droop to a feather. "Curates, unfortunately, have a position to keep up, and often not much to do it with. What does Mattie want with such a fine bonnet as this?" she continued, holding it up for inspection. "Depend upon it, now Mr. Houghton has taken a grand house, he will find out that position is expensive—if only in his daughter's smarter dress."

"But," persisted Hester, "mine is no castle in the air. Ralph speaks of this Mr. Vicars as a 'steadfast, sterling friend,' and Ralph is shrewed as well as kind. Though a curate to begin with, he may, and probably will, end with being a portly rector—oh, I fancy I can see him!—with a handsome house and grounds, and plenty of good, fat glebe land."

"Well, he may; for he has both gumption and goodness, and I hardly know which is wanted the most in this world."

Hester laughed merrily. "Oh, Mary, you wise old woman! Pray, how long have you sojourned in this vale of tears, this 'wurdle of woe,' to find out that?"

"Just long enough; or, perhaps, I should say, just one year—since we had to fight the world. It shows its ugliest aspect to the poor, you know. And now, Mr. Houghton," she added, as she put the completed bonnet into a band-box, "your daughter will want a new dress to match the new bonnet, let me tell you! By the bye, Lissie, when did Mrs. Houghton say she

should want her cap? Because she cannot have it until Saturday; we have work for some new customers that must be done at once."

Melissa, who had been absorbed in the perusal of her brother's letter, now hastily put it down, flushed, hesitated, and then, in a low tone, replied, "I did not ask her—I did not see her."

Mary gave a sharp glance at Melissa's face, saw that something had happened, and said no more. Hester, though surprised, was also silent. As for Melissa, she turned to her mother, met her calm, searching eye with meek courage, and said, distinctly and quietly:—"Mother, I have not seen Mattie to-night; I have been to chapel—to the Methodist Chapel."

Mary dropped her scissors in utter astonishment, whilst the invalid looked compassionately at Melissa. For well she knew the effort it must have been for the timid, loving girl to make such a confession to the mother of whom they all stood somewhat in awe.

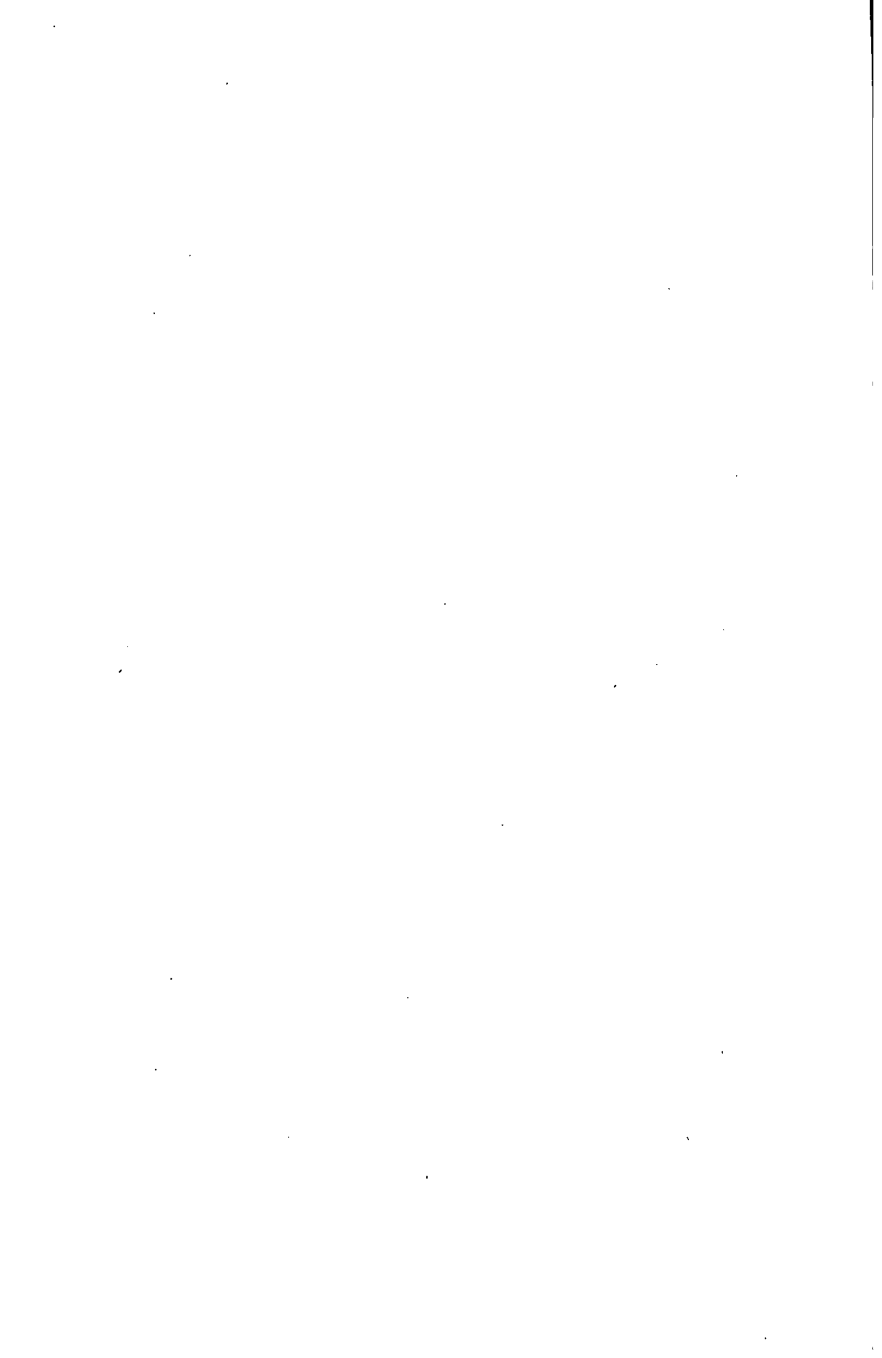
"To the Methodist Chapel!" repeated Mrs. Deane, in tones of ridicule rather than of surprise. "And now I suppose you are converted, and will show us all—your parents included—the error of our ways?"

"No, no," exclaimed Melissa, throwing back her brown curls, and with her flushed cheeks and tearful, blue eyes looking prettier than usual. "But I will try to be a better child than I have been, and—oh, please, don't be angry with me, mother; I could

N "I have been to chapel —
to the cathedral chapel."



"THE PRINCIPAL" BY W. H. W. 1871.



not help going to the chapel to night, and it has made me so happy!"

Unfortunate pleading! Mrs. Deane's scorn was intense. "And has going to church never made you feel happy? But I forgot; we are home heathen. Let me hear no more of this, Melissa. We all know that you are an excitable, pliable nature, but I never expected that you would have behaved so foolishly and with such a want of proper pride. Remember that you never enter a meeting-house again, and then I will say nothing to your father of your silly freak."

Melissa's tears fell fast. Blame from those we love is so hard to bear; from them it is poignant pain; from others it may only be added strength. And she trembled with excitement as she turned away, exclaiming, "Indeed, indeed, mother, I cannot make a promise until I am sure it is a right one; but I will think of what you say."

Mrs. Deane was momentarily speechless. Her indulgent leniency was not even appreciated! The chit would consider, forsooth, if it were right to obey her own mother! Oh, mutiny must be crushed at once! And so—"Go to your room at once, Melissa," she sternly exclaimed. "Obedience used to be a child's first duty. Return to your catechism, little simpleton, and leave these wicked, new-fangled notions!"

"Dear mother," imploringly began Melissa. But Mrs. Deane impatiently motioned her to the door

and weeping unrestrainedly, her offending daughter at once obeyed the gesture.

Mary and Hester wisely still kept silent, but they both felt very sad. This sudden exhibition of decision and firmness in one who had hitherto seemed the child of the family, of will antagonistic to their parents, too, betokened family bickerings—that worst form of family misfortune. All the brightness had now gone from Hester's face, and, as she pondered the new aspect of affairs, she sighed deeply.

Mrs. Deane looked up from her work,—calm, unruffled. “Tired and vexed, my dear?” she said, kindly. “No wonder; I was vexed myself with that foolish child, for a moment. Where she gets her stubbornness from, I can't imagine”—strong-willed parents often are surprised to see their children take after them in this respect—“but, there, those vulgar Methodists are enough to mislead any young person.”

“Well, don't be angry with Lissie, mother. As it is, I fear she will have little sleep to-night.”

“My dear, of course I am not *angry*. And lest you should have a bad night—which is of far more consequence—I will tell you all about this absurd affair. I am glad the child had the frankness” (and courage too, thought Hester) “to tell me of it herself, for I knew all about it before.”

“How so?” inquired Mary, as she cleared the table, and began to lay the supper.

“You don't suppose that gossiping will cease as long as there are old women in the world, do

you?" replied her mother, with a short laugh. "Sarah Dobbs was in this evening to buy a new ribbon for her cap, and, amongst other pleasant questions, she asked if it were true that my daughter was converted, and also, if she had joined the Methodist Society? 'My daughter has been baptized and confirmed, dame, and is too well brought up to have anything to do with the Methodists,' I replied.

"'Ay, ay, Missis,' she said; 'I told Molly Grimes so—Sister Grimes *they* call her—and she declared that she had seen Miss Deane at chapel with her own eyes this very evening, and that she was under strong conviction, too."

"'You may tell Molly,' I answered, 'that she has made a great mistake. Two of my daughters are within, and the other is at the house of a customer on business. That settles the matter.' As other customers were coming in, I turned away, and off she went to cackle elsewhere. It was fortunate that your father was not there just then. He must know nothing about it. Melissa herself will be ashamed of her conduct in a few days."

"I wish those two old busybodies had not been wagging their tongues about it, though," observed Mary, as she placed the cold meat upon the table. "It will be a miracle if father doesn't hear of it."

"In that case we must treat it as idle gossip. He must not be worried about Methodists—of all people. Now, Hester, your furmenty is ready. Let me raise you; is that comfortable? Listen! Yes

it is your father at the front door. Mind, Lissie is gone to bed; she is tired."

Hester was right. Melissa had but little sleep after that interview with her mother. To displease anyone was grievous to her, but to be compelled to wound and anger her dear parents seemed more than she could bear. Ought she to oppose them any further? Yet, how to give up attending those services for which her heart craved with the pant of extreme thirst, she did not know, for she feared, above all that could happen, to lose her new found peace, insight, and range of vision. And she naturally depended upon those means which had procured them for her to retain them. Still, obedience to parents was a simple, comprehensive, and binding duty, neglect of which was impossible without the incurrance of guilt. What ought she to do?

In her distress she lifted her heart to God, earnestly entreating His guidance and help. "My grace shall be sufficient for thee." This was the answer. And then Melissa wondered at her previous perplexity. Ah! these lightning-flashes of revelation discover *just* the right turning, at just the right time to the pilgrim; for, in the darkness of the storm, its Ruler will surely give opportune and sufficient light, if prayed for. And Melissa saw now that God would have her rely upon Himself alone, and that she might have as sweet communion with Him in church, or chamber, as in the chapel where she had been made so happy.

Peace now returned to her heart. She determined to pledge her word never to attend Methodist worship as long as it was right for her parents to withhold their permission. But she also as firmly resolved that, when she could rightfully be a free agent, she would throw in her lot with the people amongst whom the tidings of salvation had first reached her heart. Then in the early morning she fell asleep.

Mrs. Deane received her qualified submission with a slight smile of contempt at its promptitude, and of amusement at its limitation.

"Very well, Lissie," she said, "I am glad you are come to your senses so soon. As for the future, it is to be hoped you will grow wiser as you become older. Now I will go and tell Hester that this silly affair is settled satisfactorily. She is not so well this morning, and upon your account."

Poor Melissa felt as though in striving to do right she had become a culprit to all. And though a conscious rectitude of motive sustained her, yet the blame made her feel very sad.

Mary now came bustling into the room. "Lissie," she cried, "will you attend to the shop awhile? Father has just gone out to canvass with Mr. Houghton for the Tory Candidate. I do like these election times; they are such fun! Most of the Dissenters are for the Whigs you know—and father is so excited about it. I have not seen him look so cheerful this long while."

"I am very glad of that, Mary."

"You don't look very glad, then ; on the contrary, quite languid and ladyfied. Been eating humble-pie, eh ? Wholesome diet that, though not pleasant."

Melissa flushed and frowned at her sister's jesting tone. What right had she to tease her ? It was too bad !

But, before the quick retort had flashed out, she turned suddenly away, and the ireful spark in her eyes was quenched in tears. She must learn of Christ now, she remembered—though only just in time to be meek as well as firm. And she had reached the shop-door in silence, when Mary again spoke.

"Stop, Lissie," she said, "and let me give you a piece of advice—well meant, I assure you. It is just this : If you wish us to believe in these new notions of yours, don't mope, and look like a dying duck in a thunder-storm, *nor* like a martyr. Though, indeed, most of the martyrs I have read of were quite cheerful creatures. Mind, for my part, if your new religion don't make you happy, I shan't believe in it."

Melissa's face brightened. "Thanks for your sermon, Mary." Then, archly—"Why, you are as sensible as the Methodist preacher I heard last night, though you may think that no compliment." And Melissa vanished at the sound of the tinkling shop-bell, which gave evidence that a customer had entered,

"Well," thought Mary, "she's a queer child. Yet she always thought more of her duty and of

reading the Bible than the rest of us. I won't stroke her down for a poor, persecuted saint; but, if she is really a better girl for this 'being so happy,' as she called it, I'll stand by her. And, indeed, I should not have thought much of her, after all, if having grieved mother *had* made her look cheerful this morning. No! if little Lissie has grit in her as well as goodness—and she's good enough now; I doubt if the chapel can make her any better than the church has already done—if then, she still sticks to her colours, I'll take her part; she shan't be left alone." And Mary was soon deep in the mysteries of millinery.

Hester, however, did not wait to prove her sister. She was that day, as was frequently the case, in too great pain to leave her bed, and as Lissie brought up her dinner, Hester perceived her pale face and was touched by it. So, with a bright smile, she said to her, "I am glad, dear, you have done as mother bade you. As for the future, leave that to God; only be sure that you try to do His will and not your own."

"He showed me what to do last night, Hester, and I believe He will always do so when I ask Him."

Melissa spoke with shy pleasure, for she was glad, with counsel and sympathy, and yet was quite unused to express her religious feelings, Encouraged, however, by Hester's evident interest in her, and anxious that some one in the house should believe in her stability of purpose, she added earnestly:

"And don't you be deceived like the rest, Hester. By whatever name those people are called with whom I worshipped last night, I mean to be one of them when I am a woman."

"Why, Lissie?" And Hester looked with some surprise at the girlish face and figure before her.

"Because I feel they suit me better than church-people," said Melissa, decisively. "Oh! I wish you had heard the sermon last night."

"I only wish I were able to," replied Hester with a sigh, as a sharp twinge of pain made her realize the suffering of her lot. "Though," she added quickly, "I have many happy hours as well as sad ones—and heaven to look forward to. Yes, I have much to be thankful for."

Melissa thought of the "cheerful martyrs." She also felt that there was now a new bond of sympathy between Hester and herself, and was much comforted.

A few days passed and nothing occurred to disturb the usual routine of the household. Mr. Dean still remained in blissful ignorance of Melissa's "freak," for which she felt especially thankful. She quailed at the very thought that he must know of it sometime, and would take no voluntary step in the matter; for well she knew that if Ralph were her mother's pet, she was her father's, and that his anger would be in proportion to his love for her.

The electioneering went briskly forward. Party feeling, both political and religious, ran high in

the little town, especially as the Nonconformists, who had hitherto been despised, proved themselves to be much more formidable than their antagonists had ever imagined possible. They were, therefore, the more cordially hated, especially when it began to appear likely that they might bring in their man. Their opponents, however, not only worked with a will, but—what was more to the point—were far more wealthy and influential. Consequently, as the day of election drew near, the Tories, with reason, felt sanguine of success.

One evening, at the end of a hard day's canvassing, Mr. Deane came in to supper in high spirits. After a vigorous onslaught upon the pork-pie, he settled himself with his glass of ale conveniently near, in the old arm-chair, and rubbing his hands gleefully, exclaimed, "We'll beat them yet, Elizabeth, those upstart Whigs and Dissenters."

"Of course," she calmly replied, without looking up from her darning.

"Ah, you may say so, my dear, but it did not seem to be 'of course' a few days ago. However, on Friday (the election day) the true Blues will walk over them in fine style. There will be a few tussles and bloody crowns for certain, though."

Melissa looked concerned. "Oh, father," she exclaimed, "I hope you will take care of yourself, then, for you have been so active and out-spoken in this electioneering, that you will surely be a marked man."

"So old and respected a townsman as your father need have no fear, Lissie," said her mother.

"If I get a broken head from anyone, it will be from one of those Ranters," continued Mr. Deane. "And that reminds me of something. What do you think one of that canting lot had the face to tell me, wife? Though I laughed at him, I was never so near swearing in all my life."

"I dare say something absurd, not worth repeating. I would far rather hear about the nomination speeches, and that dear Sir John." And Mrs. Deane glanced at Lissie, who kept her eyes fixed on the floor.

"Absurd! preposterous! Oh, I must tell you! You see, I met Sam Wright, who's canvassing for t'other party, on the bridge this evening, and he began to talk to me about these politics. Says he, after a while, 'Ah, well, ye be fighting on what'll be the losing side in the end. But I'm in hopes of ye, man—I'm in hopes of ye yet.'"

"Ill-mannered fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Deane.

"Well, I didn't mind his way, wife—he was better off once, you know. But, he capped all when he went on to say, 'For why? Because they tell me that one of your lassies be converted, and when the bairns be brought in it's aye like the little child leading the lion. Mebbe, ye'll all be converted too; and when ye gets the right religion ye'll see right in politics.'"

"I laughed him to scorn. 'Sam,' I said, 'it is

the *want* of religion that makes you ranters, reformers, and rioters! If you stuck to the Church, you'd stick to the Constitution. but you don't. Why, you Dissenters are nought but a set of Philistines in the land! As for any of *my* daughters being Methodists—it's a lie.' And off I went. I believe the fellow invented the story on the spot, just to work me into a rage, and then bring me into his next sermon—*his* sermon forsooth!—'to point a moral, and adorn a tale.' If so, I baulked him, for I both met and left him with a laugh. *My* daughter a Methodist, indeed!"

Mr. Deane had been too engrossed in his subject to observe Lissie's confusion, or his wife's gravity—to which, by the way, he was pretty well accustomed. But he now looked at his partner, evidently expecting some comment upon all that he had related.

And so—"Sam is a fool," she coolly replied. "He might have been a master-shoemaker now, instead of a cobbler, had he not lost his connection when he forsook his Common Prayer and Catechism. There, nothing but mischief ever comes of meddling with Dissent. Lissie, go up stairs and tell Mary to be sure to leave the port-wine jelly by Hester's bed-side the last thing. Poor child! she has been so weak since the leeches were applied."

Mr. Deane looked up after Melissa as she left the room, and then said, in an anxious tone, "You don't think poor Hester is seriously worse, do you?"

"No, William; she may be much better again in a few days."

"What ails the girls, I wonder?" he continued: "There's Lissie looking quite ill to-night. Surely we are not too poor to afford them proper food?" And Mr. Deane looked alarmed at the vision he had raised.

"My dear, *I* take good care that is not the case."

"Yes, yes; you do your best, no doubt; but I hope that you and the lassies ar'n't stinting yourselves for Ralph and me? Ah, if I were but the man I was once—that will never be again."

"Never is a long day, William. Depend on it, there is sunshine in store yet for us. The girls and I do very well—Lissie, you may go to bed now."

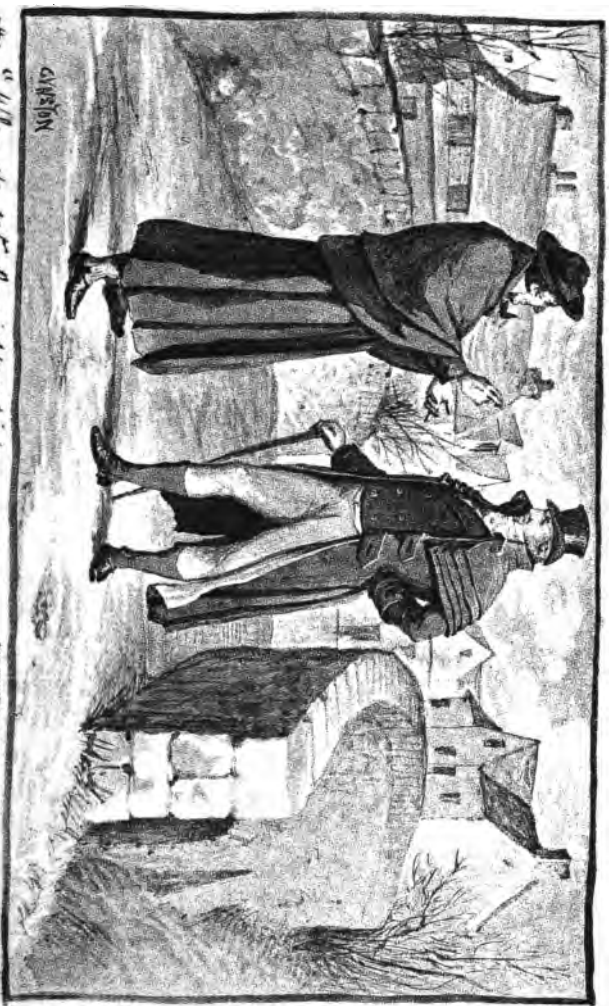
Melissa, however, had not returned, and silently re-entered the sitting-room without both purpose and determination. Go to bed she might, but not while consciously deceiving her father. He must know her secret soon—of that she was certain—for many customers had looked at her with curious interest during the last few days; and that very evening, Molly Grimes, whilst her calico was being measured out by Melissa, had exhorted her, in an energetic whisper, to continue faithful, and they would all pray for her. Her father should not again hear the bad news from strangers; besides, the straightforward path was the right, and therefore, the safe one.

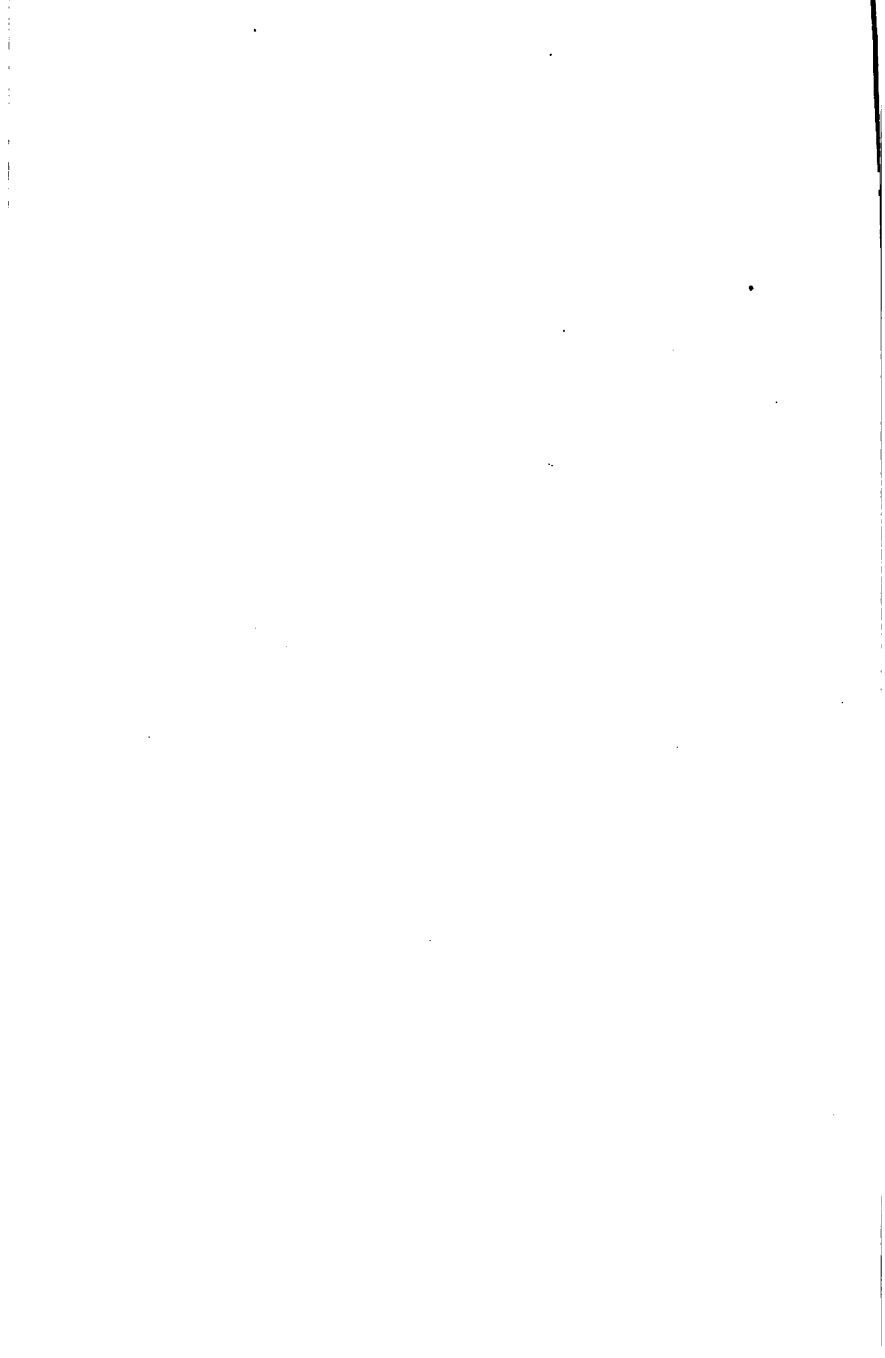
So, without heeding Mrs. Deane's remark further

M^{rs} "When the justice religion
 is in the right in practice, a

THE PICTURE BY JAMES H. B. LONDON.

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than by gathering together her work materials, Lissie said, quietly: "Mother, Hester wished me to say that she would like *you* to rub in the liniment to-night."

Now, this was a *bond fide* message, but it was sent specially by Hester that Melissa's dreaded interview with her father might be rendered less difficult by the mother's absence.

It had the desired effect. Mrs. Deane promptly put down her sewing, and at once went up to the invalid satisfied from her daughter's calm and ordinary demeanour that the threatened storm had blown over.

But as soon as Lissie heard the bedroom door close, she went over to her father, and, kneeling by the side of his chair, was about to speak, when he prevented her. Placing his hand upon her shoulder, "Well, little Lissie," he said, "what do you want to coax out of me now?" Then with a twinkle of his kind, blue eyes—"Speak out, child; mother isn't here, you know. What do you want?"

"Two things, father—forgiveness and patience."

"They're soon promised, my bairn, for you've never given me an hour's trouble in your life. But I suppose mother's vexed with you; isn't that it? I'll make that all right; yet you must do as she says, lassie—you must do as she says."

Melissa burst into tears. "Oh, father, father!" she sobbed, "it's *you* I must vex, and I can't bear to—indeed I can't. Please don't be angry with me, but it *was* true what you heard from Sam—I have been

to the Methodist chapel. And I don't know whether I am what they call 'converted,' but I feel that *I* am changed, and everything is changed to *me*. And I shall be a better girl and not a worse for having gone there, for since then I have loved God, and you, and mother, and all, better than ever before!"

Mr. Deane was, at first, too utterly taken aback to speak, though he had exchanged his lounging attitude for one of surprised and angry attention. Yet the first flush of wrath faded, and his brow unknit, as he noticed his daughter's upturned, tear-wet face.

His own became sorrowful. "Our little Lissie a Methodist!" he exclaimed, "and the rascal was right!" Then, with sudden energy—"But she shan't be! My bairn won't break her father's heart by leaving her church. No, no; she has been deluded by those wily, proselytising creatures, and they have set her against it. But she won't be a Methodist; she has always been a good child, and now she is sorry for her fault, and wants to own it, and to make it up with us. Say, that's it, my dear."

Oh, how hard it is to oppose those whom we love! Melissa was now more sorely tempted than ever before to utter submission; but her strong and newly awakened religious feelings literally constrained her to keep in the thorny path of duty.

"I cannot—I *dare* not say it," she faltered forth. "But I will promise you, if you wish it, never to go to that chapel again until I am a woman."

Her father's face clouded. "And then?" he asked.

She quaked. There was the premonitory lull of the coming storm in that quiet tone; yet the implied threat was less trying than the previous caress; and so, in a clear, if tremulous voice, Melissa declared: "Then father—and I will obey you in all but this—then I shall go there *always*."

"Never, never!" he cried, with unloosed passion, "if you do, this will cease to be your home. What! am I to be ruined by a canting Methodist, and then to cherish one in my bosom? I'll have none of the lot here, mind! Were you a boy, I'd soon flog this nonsense out of you. Let me hear no more of it. Fine Christians they are to set children against their parents in this way! Ar'n't you ashamed of yourself, Melissa?"

But Melissa only wept. Unwavering in her purpose, she yet writhed in the pain that its accomplishment caused her. Her dear father!—her kind father! Never had he spoken roughly to her before.

And even now her sobs touched his loving but passionate nature. In his excitement he had risen and stood aloof, but he returned to her and lifted her up. She stood drooping and downcast before him.

"Child, have not I always been kind to you?" he asked, reproachfully. "And you will yet be sorry for having been so ungrateful. But let me have no more of this Methodistical rubbish, mind! Do you hear?"

She bent her head submissively, and he turned and went upstairs.

Soon after Mrs. Deane entered the room. She looked at Melissa, who was sitting on the hearthrug, still weeping bitterly. "Well, child," said her mother, "if you sow the wind, you must expect to reap the whirlwind. And, remember, that I forbid another word to your father on this subject. Heaven knows he had troubles enough before!"

There was a coldness in her mother's displeasure that, somehow, always braced Melissa. Now she rose, wiped away her tears, and said, with a quiet dignity unlike her usual timid deference of manner: "Mother, I am trying to do what is *right*, and some day you will believe it."

Her firmness touched Mrs. Deane more than her grief had done, and she at once replied: "Well, if infatuated, Lissie, we believe that you are sincere; but, *because* you are infatuated, we must be inflexible. Now, go to bed."

And Melissa went, feeling, if sadder, yet stronger than ever before. For she was walking not in her own strength, but in that of the God in whom she trusted.

In the long consultation concerning "the naughty child" that followed at night between Mr. and Mrs. Deane, the latter made light of Melissa's conduct, and assured her husband that to take much notice of her folly would only be to foster it; and though the gossip about her was certainly annoying, yet it would easily be lived down. "And so, William," she concluded

“let everything seem to go on as it did before, and it will be more likely really to do so in the end.”

Mr. Deane, though still sore-hearted, was much comforted by his wife's counsel, and, whilst admiring its wisdom, fell fast asleep.





CHAPTER V.

TRIALS.

FOR some time everything did seem to go on as usual—to all but Melissa. For, however Mrs. Deane might control others, she could not prevent her own stolid displeasure from appearing in her manner. And as her husband also tried, in deference to her directions, to stifle his angry feelings, he consequently became cold and constrained in his demeanour to his former pet.

Much as Melissa felt this, she was yet cheerful; for the path of duty had been shown her, and all she had to do was to go forward in it. Now, too, living for a worthy purpose—that of becoming Christ-like—her character became more symmetrical, uniting the woman's thoughtful foresight and quiet devotion to its former child-like simplicity and sweetness. And Hope sustained her. Surely her parents would gradually be convinced that her purpose was as settled as

it was sincere, and her loving obedience would in time disarm their resentment.

When in this brighter mood she would occasionally forget the barrier of reserve now raised between herself and the family, and would speak, simply and naturally enough, of the subject that lay nearest to her heart. A chilling silence was the usual result. But once, and once only, Mary thus expressed her ideas on the subject of "pious talk."

"I don't like sermons, except in church, Lissie." Then contemptuously: "And I can't think how people can tell all their feelings so. It isn't *my* way. 'Tis so sentimental."

"Must we, then, never speak of what we feel the most?" inquired Melissa, timidly. She was always prone to think herself in the wrong.

"The less the better. Let the steam off in actions and you'll go ahead in goodness all the faster. 'Tis a sham religion that's all 'Talkee, talkee.' A light is seen and not heard, remember."

"All that is true," gently replied Melissa, after a moment's thoughtful pause, "but I think it is not *all* the truth. I am sorry I have troubled you with my thoughts, though." And as she swiftly plied her needle she communed with God in silence and told Him all her heart.

Yet her sister's sympathy would have been very precious. For God has created us social creatures, and a joy shared is a joy doubled; whilst for sorrow, sympathy is often the only earthly balm.

Ralph came home in the vacation, and his presence was like breezy sunshine in the house. He looked strong and sanguine as ever, but more thoughtful, and also, to his mother's silent delight, more "the gentleman." Of course, he now obtained a fuller account of Melissa's heresy than had been possible by letter. He was sincerely grieved about it, and argued with her kindly on the subject, yet reprovingly. It was all to no purpose. The strong religious instincts which kept him faithful to the Church, acting upon a different nature, led her *from* it. And so, one Sunday evening, when walking in the cool canal meadows, Melissa concluded a long conversation by saying to him—"It's of no use talking, Ralph. It seems to me that every one must attend that form of worship which best suits him. It was in the Methodist chapel that I first woke to a sense of sin and my need of a Saviour. It was there I found a peace that has never left me since I knew myself a forgiven and an adopted child of the Father—though you say that knowing this is impossible. And as attending the chapel does me more good than attending the church, you see I have no choice in the matter."

Now Ralph understood Greek far better than this kind of language, and he replied with conscientious earnestness: "My dear child, you are just like all women, too much guided by your feelings. Religion is a sober, rational thing, duly and correctly

explained in creeds, and its expression wisely channelled in time-honoured forms and observances, to all of which we have but to give our adhesion. How can *you*, a simple, ignorant girl, know better than the wise and good men who compiled the Book of Common Prayer? Surely, that meets all *healthy* religious needs! Mother is right; you should return to that and to the Catechism. You are now led astray by a dangerous and delusive enthusiasm—a mere fever of the feelings—for which there cannot be a better cure than the calm, practical, devotional ritual of our own dear Mother Church.”

Melissa sighed, and shook her head. “I love our prayers, Ralph, they are the most beautiful in the world. But we had better change the subject. I cannot make you understand me, but I must do what I feel—what I know to be right.”

After Ralph’s return to college, Mrs. Deane expressed marked displeasure in her behaviour to Melissa, whose stubbornness she considered had resisted even her brother’s personal influence. Arguments, of course, would be thrown away upon a simple, obstinate girl. Then too, she had been very proud of her son in his cap and gown, and she never doubted that for Melissa to become an avowed Methodist would be, in reality, the disgrace it would appear in the eyes of all those whose opinion she most valued. The “child” would not only shut herself out of society, but, probably, her family also. Besides—and this was a worthier reason—

Mrs. Deane being herself an attached and loyal member of the Church of England, heartily pitied all those outside its fold.

Persuasion having failed, she now tried to frighten Melissa from her purpose, embittering her father's mind against her, so that he treated his daughter in a harsh, captious, and irritable way. She found it impossible to please either of her parents, and, at last, constant blame, sarcastic scorn, and outbursts of anger, together with an increasing demand upon her time and strength, almost destroyed her hopefulness—though neither her patience nor the peace at the core of her heart. For she trusted in God, and He did not fail her.

Hester, as the autumn leaves fell, became rapidly worse. About a week before her death she perceived that the gentle watcher by her bedside had been weeping. Laying her skeleton hand upon Lissie's, so plump and fair, "Don't fret, dear," she said, "*I* understand you, if no one else does in the house."

"You have been a great comfort to me, darling," said Melissa, gratefully.

"I hope I have not been quite useless, indeed! But it is of you I wish to speak, now we are all alone. Lissie, do what your conscience bids you in this matter of religion. *I* should not feel it necessary to leave my church, but that is no reason why *you* should not. Different natures have different and special needs, which are provided for in these different modes of worship and aspects of thought.

As long as God is glorified in each and all, why should fellow Christians wrangle, and want to force each other to see just alike in non-essentials? Had He meant people to be all alike, He would have made them so."

"Oh! Hester," exclaimed Lissie, admiringly, "you say just what I have wanted to put into words, and could not. Who has taught you this? I am sure father and mother have not."

"As I lie here, God teaches me, I think, dear, and He makes me so happy. I am going to Him soon, Lissie!"

But this was more than Melissa could bear. She turned away to hide the tears.

"Am I selfish to speak of it?" said Hester, quickly. "It should not grieve you, if it makes *me* so happy. You forget that I am going where there is 'no more pain.'"

Calming herself, Lissie stooped and kissed her sister. "Yes, dear Hester, you will soon see the Saviour, and the Father will wipe away all tears from your eyes. And it's my home too. It's worth a little sorrow, isn't it?"

"Yes; and much suffering. Cheer up, Lissie; I will speak to father about you, and put him right." Hester could say no more, for Mrs. Deane now entered, looked suspiciously at Melissa, and then sent her away.

Now sorrow either hardens or softens the character. After Hester's death Mr. Deane became kinder and

more equable in his behaviour to Melissa, though still irritable, for prejudice dies hard. But Mrs. Deane, in her repressed grief, became sterner as well as colder. God had afflicted her, she thought—one daughter was dead, another undutiful.

And thus, with no human being to understand her, Melissa often felt very lonely, and inclined to envy Hester, who had got home so quickly. At such times an hour at the foot of the Cross would strengthen her, and then she strove cheerfully, as well as obediently, to follow the Good Shepherd's voice. And He still kept her in peace.





CHAPTER VI.

FARMER SORFLEET'S TEA PARTY.

TWO years have passed, and Melissa is now nearing her twenty-first birthday. She remembers this, as one bright September afternoon she sits with her mother and sister, stitching away in the little back parlour. Her bent head, and drooping curls, prevent her from seeing the smile of satisfaction with which Mrs. Deane regards her pale, subdued-looking countenance. Yes; she is subdued—of course. No more has been heard of her joining the Methodists, nor does she even mention her religious feelings, whilst she is more scrupulously obedient than ever. And Mrs. Deane commends to herself the wisdom of her policy, and in this milder mood begins to fancy she may now, perhaps, overlook the past.

But other people have also noticed Melissa's thinner cheek and slower step, and in them it has awakened kinder and more self-distrustful feelings. They knew

that she had neither spared herself, nor been spared ; and that, even whilst coldest to her, they had learnt to rely upon her.

Mary was the first to relent. She had *gradually* satisfied herself that Melissa's religion was real—so particular are we about the quality of other people's goodness—and that she was as plucky as she was pliable. Certainly, she had made no moan to *Mary*. Now that tough but true-hearted girl, by well-timed hints, quickened her father's perception as to the state of Melissa's health, and just implied its cause.

Then the recollection of Hester's entreaties, and of Hester in her coffin, fairly frightened Mr. Deane. And his conscientiousness and warm heart completed the welcome change in him, from a captious irritability to his natural genial affection. It gave him, too, quite a sense of relief now that his pent-up nature suddenly and peremptorily re-asserted itself.

"Come, my lass," he exclaimed, addressing Melissa, as he bustled from the shop into the dark, little parlour. "I want you to come for a ride with me. We must see what a little fresh air will do for you ; you stick to the shop and to the needle too much. No need, no need, now that Ralph is a tutor. His college expenses are over, and that's a mercy, certainly ! Elizabeth, you can spare Lissie this afternoon ? I am going over to Belford to see Sorfleet ; it may touch up his memory a bit. If he settles his account, it will just enable me to square up with Newton's traveller to-morrow."

"I can spare her, if necessary, William; but Mary and I will have to drive to get this finery done." And she pointed to an evening dress on which the two girls were busily engaged. "It is for the vicar's wife, you know."

"Oh, I could finish this myself, mother," declared Mary, confidently, "and I will too. Run and change your dress, Lissie."

Melissa looked at the scrap of blue sky, and the glint of sunlight which the tiny back yard permitted her to see, and then inquiringly at her mother.

"You may go, child. Why do you keep your father waiting?"

"Oh, thank you, mother! And, Mary, I will do my share when I come back. See that you leave it for me."

"Away with you," was the reply. "Don't you know that you arn't wanted here? Take yourself off!"

Accordingly, Melissa disappeared, smiling at Mary's uplifted finger.

Mr. Deane laughed. "You shall come next time, Mary. And now, as I am going into a kind of land of Goshen, what shall I bring home?"

"Well, beggars can't be choosers, father; but I know Mr. Sorfleet has some splendid preserving plums. If we get some of the fruit given us, it will bring the sugar cheap. Or damsons, if it's not too early yet."

"Arn't you reckoning without your host, Mary?" asked Mrs. Deane, in calm amusement.

"No, *with* him," promptly replied the daughter; "for did you ever know father return empty-handed from Farmer Sorfleet's? Besides, it is the country fashion, and a very nice fashion, too."

Melissa and her father were soon driving in a high gig along the Belford Road. It lay between low, clipped hedges, on either side of which were fields, now vividly green from the recent autumnal rains. The whirling white sails of many a mill glistened against the blue sky; the river flashed, like a sword-blade in the sunshine, athwart a landscape peculiar in the contrast of its pollards and poplars, and in the intense peacefulness expressed in the fertility and monotony of its aspect; whilst a canal, with one slow-drawn barge in sight, crept sluggishly through the rich and level meads, whence came the distant lowing of cattle, varied by the nearer warble of the robin from yellowing ash and elm.

Melissa's spirits rose as the bracing, easterly breeze bathed her face, and brought the colour to her cheeks. And her father's cheery talk seemed so like old times, that she could not but feel happy, notwithstanding the approaching crisis. For in another week, becoming of age, she implicitly believed that she must then choose between leaving her home, or renouncing all future connection with the Methodists. In view of this prospect she had made some unobtrusive enquiries as to the means of obtaining employment out of Castleton,

though with the most discouraging result. However, she would not think of this now, but would

“ Give to the winds her fears,
Hope and be undismayed.”

Now she would enjoy the sunshine and the holiday.

On approaching their destination the road gradually rose, and the eye fell gratefully upon successive hill-curves, indicating the commencement of the Wolds. Belford lay in the valley. Its houses struggled about in the usual don't-careish village style, and Farmer Sorfleet's residence was at the further end of the place. It was a low-roofed, thatched farmhouse that contemptuously turned its back upon the road, and exhibited barns and pigsty to the general public. The gabled front of the house looked towards the sloping fields, from which it was separated by a neglected lawn, with a weeping willow in its centre. On the one side lay an orchard, its gnarled, mossy old trees laden with ruddy and golden-gleaming fruit, and on the other a well-stocked kitchen garden; whilst by the road-side, near the wicket, was the inevitable duck pond, into which a chubby urchin was throwing stones.

As Mr. Deane drove up, the farmer, brawny, broad-shouldered and jolly, appeared at the gate. He shook hands heartily with his visitors, exclaiming in a mild, musical tenor that seemed to belong

to him by mistake, "Why, Deane, you've come just in the nick of time. How's Miss, to-day? But where's the missus; why didn't you bring her along? Couldn't be spared, I s'pose? Come in, man, come in. I'll send the carter to stable the mare. Now you're here you'll have to stay, d'ye see?"

"Well, I mean to do that," laughed Mr. Deane; "I came on business, to tell the truth."

"Ay, to be sure; but we'll see if we can't combine business with pleasure for once."

They had now entered the farmyard and were passing the large pigsty.

"Come, Miss Deane," said Sorfleet, stopping, "I must show you as fine a sow and as pretty a litter of young'uns as you'll find anywhere."

So they all looked over the boarding, and saw, basking in the afternoon sun, a big, black sow, round and over whom there swarmed quite a tangle of tiny porkers, squeaking and squealing with wonderful persistency. But when they became too troublesome materfamilias gave an emphatic grunt of disgust, and then slowly arose and overturned her progeny—a proceeding against which they protested by a shrill and vehement outcry.

Melissa was much amused at them. "What funny little things they are," she exclaimed. "It's a pity they will ever grow so fat and ugly, like the old one."

"Ugly!" echoed the farmer. "That's a splendid

sow, Miss Deane—quite a beauty! Ah, you may laugh, but it's a fact. You will like this fellow better, though," he added, as a pretty brown pony, with a white star upon its forehead, came whinnying from the stable and stretched its head over the palings, pricking up its quick, sensitive ears at the sound of its master's voice, and looking at him with soft, fiery eyes.

"Ah, old fellow! does it want a scamper round the orchard?" said Mr. Sorfleet, addressing it in a caressing tone, and patting its arched neck. "Now that's what I call a handsome hoss."

"Oh, it's a beauty!" said Melissa. "But, see how it tosses its head; I should be afraid to ride it."

"It knows you are praising it, mebbe, Miss Deane; anyways, it's a sensible creetur, and a sperrited one."

They had now reached a bowery little porch at the side of the house. From within came the sound of many voices and masculine laughter, and Mr. Deane exclaimed: "Bless my heart, Sorfleet, you have company! I won't bother you about accounts now; I'll come another day."

"Come another day and welcome, but you'll stay now. The fact is, it's my birthday, and I've got a few friends to keep it up with me, and help me to forget that I'm a poor old bachelor. So, come along, here are a lot of young fellows will be glad to see you."

He at once threw open a door, and they entered

a parlour, long, low and gloomy. Some sporting prints hung upon its walls, and upon the table were wine and spirit decanters, a jug of hot water, a basin of sugar, and many glasses—far from empty.

Farmer Sorfleet forthwith introduced his new guests to the company, but in such a free-and-easy way as to spare Melissa the ordeal of a separate introduction to several young men, who rose as she and her father entered, and amongst whom were a handsome young farmer, a game-keeper and a very shabby-looking tradesman. By his side there sat an elderly lady, homely and shrewd in appearance, whom he addressed as "aunt," and to her Melissa at once made her way, for she felt abashed at suddenly finding herself amongst so many gentlemen.

After seeing his guests fairly started in conversation, Mr. Sorfleet's countenance suddenly assumed a serious expression, and he disappeared into the adjoining kitchen. But a few minutes had elapsed, however, when he returned, burst into the parlour with alarming emphasis, and, laughing boisterously, exclaimed—

"Here's a go! I'll have to get tea myself, Old Betty's grandson has fallen into the pond, and after fishing him out, she's bundled off with him as fast as her rheumatics would let her, to see to him. He's got no mother, poor little chap! So you'll have to put up with pot-luck, all of you. I'm very sorry, 'pon my word."

"Never mind, Sorfleet," said Cussons, the young farmer before mentioned, "I'll help you."

"And I, and I," cried the other gentlemen.

A rush towards the kitchen ensued; but Mr. Sorfleet placed himself in the doorway, thereby almost filling it, as a picture does a frame, and prevented all egress.

"No, no," he exclaimed, "four of you are married folk. Ted Cussons and I are the only bachelors here, and we will show you how well we can manage without wives. I beg the ladies' pardon, but, you see, we like to make the most of our freedom while we've got it."

"That is because you don't know how little it is worth," replied the lady by whose side Melissa had taken refuge.

"We'll argue the question after tea, Mrs. Gow," said her host. "I know when the kettle boils, at any rate. Come along, Ted!" He threw open the kitchen door, and then added, with a laugh, "Why, here! Betty's dropped her cap and apron; you'll look tidy in them, my boy."

The young fellow showed his white teeth, strode out, and presently reappeared with a voluminous print apron tied round his waist, and Betty's mob-cap upon his curly brown head. Unmoved by the laughter which he provoked, he gravely proceeded to unfold a damask tablecloth, whereupon the married gentlemen clattered the glasses and

decanters from the table in such haste that one of the former was smashed.

This elicited the remark from Ted, "that men-folk were such awkward creatures;" and he proceeded to show the superiority of cap and apron (which seemed to have inspired him) by laying the cloth and setting the tray as deftly and correctly as any "neat-handed Phyllis."

The farmer-host now appeared with silver urn, cream ewer and sugar basin, and then Ted and he vanished, presently to come again upon the scene with delicately thin bread-and-butter, and toasted muffins. A home-made loaf, and a roll of fresh-churned butter were placed at one end of the table, in order, explained Mr. Sorfleet, that they might "cut and come again." He then seated himself behind the urn, whilst his lieutenant saw the company comfortably placed.

"Now," exclaimed the host, who, as he passed the cups round, looked equally flurried and happy, "if any of you call that 'husband's tea,' you are mistaken. Anybody want more sugar or cream? I hope I have made your tea agreeable, ma'am? It's just right? Then that's all right. Miss Lissie, I think yours isn't; let me sweeten it a little more."

"No, thank you, Mr. Sorfleet; it's very nice indeed; only, if you would add a little water to it, please?" For truly, before being creamed, it had been as black as Lissie's shoe.

"Too potent, is it?" he replied, in a surprised tone.

"Well, each one to his taste; for my part, I don't like much water in my tea—or my grog, either." However, he supplied some of the despised liquid to Lissie's cup, and then added: "Why, Ted, for shame! you are handing Miss Lissie the last slice of bread-and-butter."

That young bachelor coloured, but promptly replied, "Then Betty had better cut some more." And he at once began to replenish the plate.

In the meantime, Mrs. Gow had handed Lissie the muffins, remarking, "You should have offered me that slice, Mr. Cussons. I have a husband, but I can do with £500 per annum in addition."

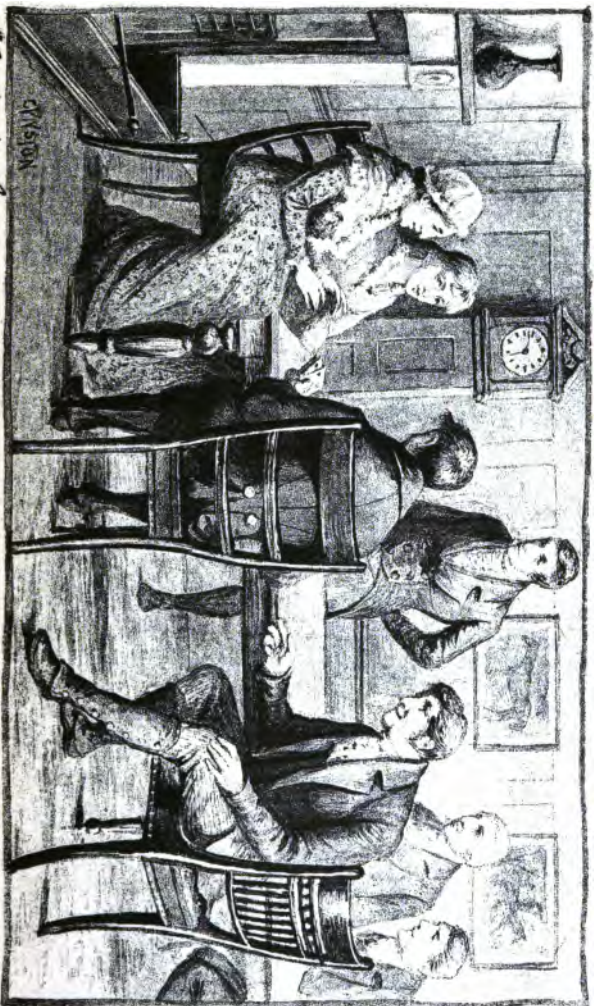
The ladies having now, it was considered, been duly complimented, the gentlemen began to talk of their afternoon's shooting and its result. A part of it certainly appeared in their sharpened appetites, for there was a constant passing to and fro of cups, and the eatables disappeared with wonderful celerity.

Presently, Mr. Sorfleet considered it necessary to make a fresh infusion of tea, but it was discovered that boiling water was not forthcoming. This caused much bustle, running to and fro, bursts of laughter, cracking of jokes, and altogether such noisy hilarity, that Melissa thought it the queerest tea-party she had ever seen. As for Mrs. Gow, she sipped her tea, and looked on in grave amusement.

But everything below must have an end. When the jolly farmer and Ted Cussons found it useless to press more upon the guests, they packed up and

carried off the paraphernalia of the feast with much noise and great speed. Ted finally crumpled up the tablecloth, with the crumbs in it, like an old sheet ; and, taking a good aim through the open door, tossed it upon the kitchen table just as Betty reappeared. She made a dash at it, shook it out indignantly, and then, seeing Ted for the first time in his feminine array, fairly stood aghast. There was a general roar at her expense, but, noways disconcerted, she curtsied to Cussons, and gravely bade him to "Please fold master's best cloth with her." With admirable docility the tall young fellow immediately faced the dumpy old woman, and, taking the two ends of the damask cloth as though he were going to shake a carpet, stood prepared. He would soon have made summary work of the folding, but Betty made him begin again, bidding him fold it in the creases—"So, sir." However, "Ted" could not manage it to her satisfaction ; and, at last, he threw the cloth down, untied and shook off cap and apron—holding forth the former by the frills very tenderly—and then exclaimed, "Here, dame ; here's your property, and a shilling to pay for the damage." Whereupon Betty curtsied, and trotted off in great content.

Cards were now introduced, but Mrs. Gow declined to play. No one appeared surprised at this ; and Mr. Sorfleet satisfied himself by seeing her comfortably placed in the easy chair, fetching a stool for her feet, and placing a glass of wine for her on the mantelpiece, just within her reach. She placidly accepted these

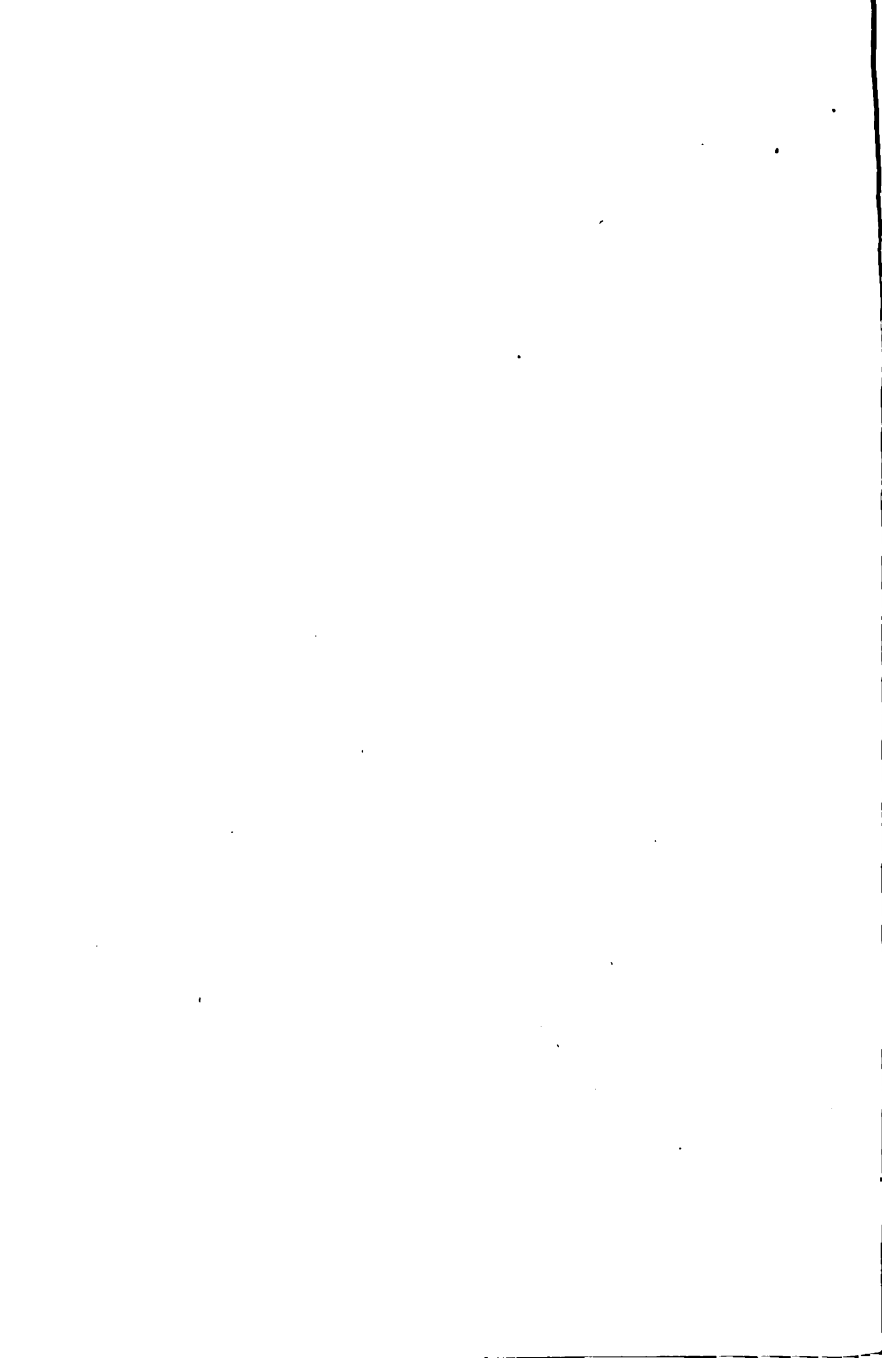


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courtesies, and then took from her reticule a stocking, the heel of which she proceeded to turn.

Ted Cussons was assigned to Melissa as a partner at cribbage, and the other gentlemen engaged in a rubber of whist. This seemed dry work, for gin and whiskey circulated freely, whilst they were earnestly engaged in the game, though Mr. Sorfleet—who seemed uneasy in his mind—was several times missing. Upon these occasions he invariably reappeared from the kitchen, whence issued a very savoury odour.

In the pauses of the game there was a desultory conversation between the gentlemen, by which Melissa was first amused, and then bored. But Mrs. Gow was more interested in it, and as she rattled away at her knitting, now and then put in a word, at one time giving a full, true, and particular account of the illness of her best milch cow, and the remedies she had used for it. Whereupon the gentlemen turned from their cards, and listened to her with the most earnest and respectful attention.

About nine o'clock, Mr. Sorfleet, after a longer absence than usual, re-entered and invited them all to "toddle into the other room, where they would find a good fire, and something to eat upon the table."

Acting upon his advice, and following his example, the company proceeded to the best parlour, where they found what Sturge, the gamekeeper, termed "a jolly good spread." This consisted of a fat Michaelmas goose, with apple sauce, and ham and mashed

potatoes, to say nothing of a huge apple pie and damson tart.

All were speedily seated, and their plates were soon well filled, the host being in a state of great activity. For there was no one to act as waiter, Betty having gone home, and being now, probably, in bed. So Mr. Sorfleet was constantly on the move; now fetching something that had been forgotten: now drawing more ale, and refilling the glasses all round; then sitting down to carve—and up again in quite a ferment of hospitality. At last, Ted Cussons exclaimed: “Do sit down, Sorfleet, and have your own supper, and not keep hopping about so. We are all very jolly and comfortable; arn’t we now?” appealing to the company. To this question there was a chorus of assent, which so quieted the mind of the host that he forthwith commenced the business of supper for himself. This seemed to be a more serious matter than the light refreshment of tea; and Melissa was amused at the earnest attention given to the good things, and the hearty praise bestowed upon them.

After the table had been cleared, the decanters were again produced, and the company settled themselves comfortably for a few hours’ joviality, with the exception of Mr. Deane, who now spoke of returning home. Rough, but friendly hands were immediately laid upon him. “Why, it was not to be thought of—they had not yet drunk Sorfleet’s health, or wished him ‘many happy returns of the day!’”

That this might not again be a stumbling-block, Mr. Deane at once proposed the toast, and in a "neat little speech" testified to the general esteem in which their host was held as a good farmer, a kind neighbour, and a jolly fellow. He concluded by wishing him, in the name of the company, not only the compliments of the day, but also "by this time next year, the prettiest lass in Linshire."

The toast was drunk with uproarious cheers; indeed, it was wonderful how so few could make such a noise—and Farmer Sorfleet appeared meditating a formal reply. After a pause of thoughtful perplexity, however, he contented himself by exclaiming, "Thank'ee, thank'ee, friends; I am much obliged to ye, I'm sure—and very pleased to see ye all!" Then, turning to Mr. Deane, he added, "I say, old boy; you'll let me know where that lass is you were tellin' on just now—I'd like to have a look at her." "Wouldn't say for the world, Sorfleet, or I should get into hot water with ever so many other pretty girls, I know."

"Ah, well, then, I must e'en keep house for myself, as I have done since the mother died! And there's many a worse way of living, let me tell you. I get up when I like, go to bed when I like, and take my meals when I like—get 'em too, for I can fry a rasher, or toss a pancake, as well as any woman in the county. Then, as for the house—why, Betty comes every few days and makes my bed, and clears up a bit! By day I've

plenty to do on the farm, and a welcome and a glass of something hot and strong for any neighbour who drops in. Of an evening there are lots of homes open to me for ten miles round, plenty of jolly friends to be seen, and last—but not least—quiet at nights, when I get home. So a bachelor's life for me, I say, and a jolly life it is!"

"For a time, Sorfleet," said Sturge, the gamekeeper, a shrewd, sandy-haired Scotchman; "for a time. But, remember, there's a mighty difference between an old and young bachelor. An old 'un seems to me to be a poor, forlorn creature, and a shivering, cowardly creature into the bargain. He were afeared to venture on matrimony when he were young, and now—sarve him right—he's left out in the cold with, mebbe, the rheumatics, or the gout, and no one to nurse him except some wrinkled, snuffy old woman, who drinks his gin and gives him physic—likewise gruel. No buxom wife to keep his house straight—and him, too, for the matter o' that, when he's well, and to cosset him up comfortable when he's bad. No little bairn climbing on to his knee as he sits in the bonny blink o' his ain fireside; no saucy young rascal pulling his hair, and rifling his pockets of sweets. Oh, Lor'! if I had to live by myself, I'd be downright sick of myself! But there, every man to his taste, and a bachelor's life b'aint to *mine*."

"So it seems, Sturge, so it seems. Is the last youngster the tenth or twelfth?" pertly inquired Mrs. Gow's nephew.

"Well, sartainly, it's to be hoped it *is* the last. But the more the merrier; and if they can't have bread and cheese, they won't starve on the bread forsaken."

"That's right, Sturge; stand up for us married men," exclaimed Mr. Deane, clapping him on the shoulder. "And now for a song—stop, let me fill your glass first."

"Thank'ee, thank'ee. But I'm not much of a nightingale myself; Sorfleet, or you Ted, can trill better than me."

"No, no, Sturge," replied Cussons, "you won't get out of it so. Let's have 'The Lavender Gloves.' You know you can sing it first-rate."

"Well, I'm agreeable to entertain the company—if so be I can."

Accordingly, folding his arms, and looking very serious, Mr. Sturge, in a voice suggesting that of a corn-crake rather than the bird he had mentioned, went solemnly through the adventures of the 'Lavender Gloves' belonging to a pretty housemaid. In conclusion, he emptied his glass, sat down, and with a look of satisfaction, exclaimed, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, I've done *my* duty, and will call on our worthy host to do his, and to give us a song."

Mr. Sorfleet, or "Jack," as he now began to be called—the whiskey still circulating freely—modestly desired some other friend to tune up. But after some evidently sincere persuasion he gave the "Death

of Nelson" in a fine tenor, and with such correct expression, as quite to surprise Melissa.

Shirking the applause that followed, he turned to Sturge and remarked, "I say, did you see pa'son this afternoon?"

"Lor', no! Not likely to, out shootin' rabbits on the moor!"

"Well, that a'n't church, exactly; but the jolly old Briton is as good at unearthing a fox as at reading the Creed. You saw the hunt, didn't ye!"

"Ay, ay; and I saw my master amongst the scarlet coats. I know the sight of him well enough."

"I'm sorry for you, Sturge," said Ted, slyly. "If you'd been to church oftener you'd have known the parson too."

"Well, that's true; but the church and I be a good way apart, remember. And it is no great matter either, if so be the 'nearer the church, the further from heaven!'"

"No, no; we don't hear nought against the church in *this* house," said Sorfleet, decisively. "Why, man, it's like speaking agen your own mother."

"Seems to me," returned the Scotchman, "she's been a kind o' step-mother to the Dissenters."

"Come, now," said Mr. Deane, in a conciliatory tone, "let's drink the health of His Majesty, and down with Papists, Dissenters, Jews, and all other heretics! and then I must be off. Lissie, lass, you had better get on your things."

Mrs. Gow now rose, and signified to her nephew that they also had better be returning.

"All right, aunt," said that gentleman, "and we'll drink the king's health while you are putting on your bonnet."

So the two ladies went upstairs, and then Melissa noticed how carefully Mrs. Gow closed the chamber door, and glanced round the room.

"There is no one about, ma'am," she observed; "Mr. Sorfleet keeps no servants, you remember."

"Yes, I believe we are alone. But it is best to take as little as possible for granted in this world—it saves no end of blunders. And now I am going to ask what may seem like an impertinent question."

Not knowing what to say, Melissa remained silent, and Mrs. Gow continued: "Miss Deane, is it true that you are a Methodist?"

The one addressed wondered if her recent guarded enquiries for employment in some Methodist family had come to her questioner's ears. She also wondered if Mrs. Gow had any right to put the question, and therefore parried it by another.

"Why do you ask me?" she said.

"That I cannot tell you, at present. But I can perceive, Miss Deane, that your father is bitter against Dissenters, and he considers that Methodists must be Dissenters, which is not always true."

"I cannot speak of him," said Melissa, "but I may of myself. I *am* a Methodist; and I intend, as soon as I can procure employment, to leave

home that I may not vex my parents by attending, in my native place, services of which they disapprove. You live near Linchester, do you not, Mrs. Gow?"

"I do," replied that lady, concisely, at the same time putting on her gloves with much care and intentness.

"I have heard that there are many Methodists there. If I could but get some employment amongst them, now——"

"If you are ready we will go down, my dear. Let me fasten your cloak; your hands shake." Then Mrs. Gow's homely, firm features relaxed as she added—"I am a Methodist, Miss Deane; my nephew and his family are not. I am staying with them a while to nurse his sick wife, who is now better. I came over to Belford this afternoon with him merely for the drive, but he stayed, and I had no choice but to remain also. I have Methodist friends in Linchester and will not forget you. Don't rely on me, though; trust in God alone." Then in her usual dry manner, "Now, shall we go down?"

Melissa assented. She would have liked to have asked more questions, but she perceived that it would be useless to attempt to get anything out of Mrs. Gow against her inclination. She evidently said what she meant to, and not a word more. Impulse, and promptitude of speech were beyond her capacity, though it was doubtful how much she might not be able both to see and to do.

The gentlemen downstairs were now becoming excited ; a few oaths were slipping out, and rather freer jokes. Hitherto, the presence of the ladies had restrained them, but the intoxicants imbibed were at last beginning to be felt—well seasoned as the imbibers were.

Yet Farmer Sorfleet at once became himself as the ladies entered. There was a lull in the merriment, and the "farewells" were gone through most respectfully by each and all of the gentlemen. The host then accompanied his departing guests to the gate, and after bidding Mrs. Gow and her nephew "Good-bye," he returned to Mr. Deane, who had just sprung into the gig, and taken the reins into his hands.

"I'll be in on Saturday, Deane," said he, shaking hands with him, "and then I'll square up accounts with you, and I'll bring a good basket full of plums with me. I saw that Miss Lissie fancied the fruit-tart to night. Hope the Missus won't scold you for being so late."

"That's a bachelor's idea, Sorfleet. The Missus will be glad to hear I've spent so pleasant an evening. I shall be home in an hour, and suppose you will be thinking of going to bed by then."

"Not I, indeed ; just as we shall be getting into the thick of the fun ! We shall sit out the night, and go to bed when the lark gets up. Good-bye, Miss Lissie. Give my respects to all at home."

Mr. Deane and his daughter had a silent drive

home. She was thinking of her conversation with Mrs. Gow, and he was disappointed at returning without payment. He went to bed cross and sleepy; but, tired as Melissa was, she lay awake half the night, planning how she might best tell her parents that she was still a Methodist, and must now worship with the people of her choice. Yet she thought in vain, and at last determined to leave both time and terms to the guidance of Providence.





CHAPTER VII.

MRS. DEANE MAKES A MISTAKE.

THE next morning there was a letter from Ralph announcing his appointment to a curacy at £150 per annum, through the influence of his college friend, Mr. Vicars. All were delighted, and though it was a pouring wet day, there was plenty of sunshine in Ralph's home. Mrs. Deane positively hummed a snatch of an old ballad over her sewing, and intimated that she really thought they must buy themselves new pelisses, and that their father must get a new beaver. Mr. Deane, whose good humour was increased by the non-appearance of the traveller, went in and out of the sitting-room, chuckling and rubbing his hands. "Upon my word, Elizabeth," he cried, "I believe we shall look up in the world again, now; I do, indeed."

Mary was serene and smiling; Lissie pleased, but yet thoughtful. For it seemed as though every

household joy had now a sharp edge for her. Try as she would, she could not dismiss the thought that Ralph was always fortunate; all concerning him brought sunshine and joy to the family, while she seemed doomed to bring cloud and gloom to it. Well, she would not do so while all basked in the present outburst of brightness—this, certainly, would be an inopportune time to declare to them the disagreeable necessity there was for her to banish herself from home. And again Melissa waited.

In about a week Farmer Sorfleet paid his bill, and brought the promised present of fruit besides. More was bought of him; and then the girls became absorbed in preserving, and in making the new Sunday raiment. This important business, however, concluded, it seemed to Melissa as though there was nothing to prevent her from introducing the old, sore subject of her religious opinions. And then she shrank from doing so with sudden and utter cowardice. The household peace now seemed restored—and they had been so much kinder to her of late! *Could* she bear coldness, displeasure, harshness, once more? She loved to please people as well as to win their affection. She could not bear to be thought of contemptuously and unkindly: and it would be so hard, too, to vex her father again. Why not go on quietly? No one seemed inclined to remind her of the past; why not bury it? But these thoughts did not dominate in her heart; conscience conquered in the conflict there. And so

it came to pass one night that, after earnest prayer, her spiritual vision became clear. She saw that any further delay in taking up her cross would be no longer caution but cowardice, and determined the very next morning to tell her parents of her resolve to leave home as soon as possible, and her reason for it.

Now, did she encounter violent expostulation and stormy anger, ending in a heartless expulsion from the paternal roof? No; I am not writing a romance—though there is plenty of the oddest and the wildest incident in life—and our gentle heroine did but prove that “man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.” For the next morning, as she sat down to her breakfast, pale and without appetite but collected, her father bustled in from the shop, exclaiming—“A letter for you, Lissie, and in a strange handwriting, too!”

A thrill passed through her as some swift intuition or presentiment of the contents of the letter, nerved and brightened her. She opened it eagerly—so eagerly as to cause her mother to remark, as she passed her coffee, “You seem to expect good news, Lissie, and that is the way to be disappointed.” Mary looked at her with curiosity, but said nothing; and Mr. Deane was just then called away by a ring at the shop-door, signifying that some one had entered.

Melissa had soon read her letter, and her instincts had not belied her. She seized the opportunity of

her father's absence to speak. "Mother," she said, quietly enough—for she knew that nothing annoyed or hardened Mrs. Deane so much as hesitation or timidity—"Mother, I have here the offer of a situation as housekeeper, or useful companion—both terms are used—to a lady in Linchester. A quarter's notice will be given on either side: I intend to accept it. The lady is a Methodist."

Mrs. Deane looked amazed. She had thought her offending daughter conquered; in fact, quite flattened; and here she was, calm, persistent, resolute, and mistress of the situation. She was of age, too; and no one had now a legal right to control her actions; and this letter had rendered her no longer dependent upon her parents. Certainly, she was very conscientious in her religious convictions, and had been very patient, as well as persistent; but these facts did not make the present aspect of affairs any the less provoking to Mrs. Deane, who, nevertheless, was far too proud to show anything of her discomfort. "Very well, Lissie," she replied; "you had better tell your father." And she continued her breakfast as serenely as before, first putting her husband's rasher in front of the fire to keep warm in his absence.

He entered just as Melissa had finished her repast. She rose, placed the letter in his hand, and then went to her own room to thank her Heavenly Father for His love and faithfulness. As for Mr. Deane, after reading a few sentences, he hastily threw down

the epistle, exclaiming—"Stuff! nonsense! We can't spare little Lissie, and, what's more, we won't. Now that Ralph is started for himself, we can very well afford to keep her at home."

"But it will be *best* for her to go, father," said Mary, promptly preventing her mother's antagonistic answer. "And if you don't want to lose Lissie altogether, you had better let her go, freely and kindly. No one can thrive in body if they pine in spirit—and Lissie *is* pining to worship as she wishes. Wait a minute, mother, please—I know what you were going to say. You see, father, Melissa will go to Linchester, because she thinks it right to do so, and that God has opened to her a path in her perplexity. I think so, too; and also, that it would be wrong to oppose Providence. Hester would have wished your consent, I know; and still more so, that Lissie should not leave home in disgrace."

"That is inevitable, Mary," now sternly observed her mother. "It *is* disgraceful wilfully to disobey her parents: I suppose you will turn Methodist next!"

"If Methodism be so catching as that, we shall all be liable to take it, dear mother," replied Mary, with a smile. "But poor Lissie has suffered so much in being, as she believed, compelled to grieve and resist us all—she has often been crying half the night—that I think, as we cannot alter her convictions, we ought not to make her feel she is driven from home; surely that would be enough to set her against the church we love."

"Why, bless the child! what are you arguing about?" impatiently exclaimed her father. "No one wishes her to leave home."

"But she will worship where and how she thinks best, father; though in aught but her religion she will be tractable enough. Don't you see it is best, both for her and for us, that she should go? For, in that case, no one here need know of her Methodism."

Mr. Deane now did appear to see, and the perception did not make him at all comfortable. He pushed his plate from him, looked uneasily at his wife, but said nothing.

Reticent as that good lady usually was, she could no longer retain all her wrath. A little bubbled over.

"I tell you what *I* see, William," she declared, "that Melissa is a stubborn, ungrateful child; and I think you are all leagued against me. *My* consent to her going to this Methodist place at Linchester has not been asked, and it will not be given. Mary, you may tell her so." And the indignant mother commenced to pack up the breakfast things in a way indicating considerable disgust with people in general, and Melissa in particular.

Mary said no more, but went up stairs to her household work, and Mr. Deane, having slowly drunk his last cup of coffee, left the room with the letter in his hand. About half-an-hour afterwards he descended into the sitting-room, apparently merely

to announce to his wife that he was going for his morning's stroll. But this seemed to be an unusually difficult undertaking: he lingered, fidgetted about, and, after clearing his throat, said, desperately: "Elizabeth, it is my desire that nothing more be said to Melissa about her religion; those confounded Methodists have bewitched her; and I blame them, and not her, poor child! She's a good bairn, and a bonny; and though she must leave home it shall be with my blessing—and I have told her so!"

Mr. Deane had not spoken so decidedly for years, for his wife generally managed him too well ever to rouse him to assert his rightful authority. She now perceived that, through her anger, she had made a mistake in asserting her own will, instead of persuading her husband by appearing to consult his. No consciousness of her error, however, appeared in her manner: she answered calmly, "I thought it was all settled, William. I shall certainly say no more to Melissa on the subject you have mentioned."

Mr. Deane looked at his wife doubtfully; she remained unruffled. He still puzzled over her countenance; she smiled up into his. "Don't you know, William, that your will is law—to *me*, at least?" she said.

Her husband at once came forward, radiant with relief; kissed her, called her a "sensible old woman, and the best wife in the world," and then took up his hat and went off, whistling like a boy. And his

light-heartedness softened, in some degree, Mrs. Deane's resentment against her daughter. For she loved her husband more than any one except—must we say it?—except her handsome, fond, and fortunate son!

And so it was settled that Melissa should leave her home, in order that she might worship God in the way she wished to.





CHAPTER VIII.

NEW FRIENDS.

IT is the last day of October. The sun is shedding his farewell rays over the city of Linchester, setting in a wild sky, with its hurrying scuds, stormy cloud-piles of crimson and murk, and its fiery glow along the western horizon—a wrathful flush preceding the frown of night! There is the sound, too, of a rising gale, swelling and dying upon the ear like snatches of martial music; and fresh masses of clouds troop up, still gathering in the moody west until the nearer bugle of the blast shall sound.

Melissa and her new friend, Sophia Stanley, are conversing in the drawing-room of a pretty villa on the outskirts of the city. It stands in its own grounds, and on a slight eminence, at the bottom of which is a stream, slow-flowing and rushy-margined. Beyond it the level fields extend into the far distance. A different view of the landscape, however, is obtained

from the drawing-room window. From thence is seen the city, situated partly at the base and partly on the steep sides of an abrupt hill, on the summit of which the fine cathedral stands prominent—its towers and pinnacles now crimson in the reflection of the ruby light that still burns where the sun lingers in the horizon.

Before it dips below, and the brief autumnal twilight glooms into darkness, let us take a peep at the two girls, who are chatting over their needlework in the large bay window. Melissa looks much happier than she did; although those thick brown curls of hers shade a face that, with its soft, blue eyes and gentle smile, is always pleasing.

Miss Stanley, if less regular in feature than her new friend, is more striking in appearance, possessing a mingled power, vivacity, and winsomeness of expression that more than compensate for the absence of actual prettiness. Her erectness, her square brow, and firmly moulded chin, her auburn hair and blooming complexion, give a brightness and positiveness to her appearance, agreeably softened by a dress of black silk, edged at the throat and wrists with white lace. Still, there is more of dignity and spirit in the poise of her head, the curve of her lips, and the sparkle of her quick brown eyes, than of sweetness—until she smiles, when, even if silent, she is charming; but does she speak, it is in such a silvery voice, and in tones so delicately modulated to her meaning, that then she is irresistible.

Had she been a man, Melissa, doubtless, would have been distractedly in love with her; as it was, she regarded her with a mixture of respect and affectionate admiration, which were fully expressed in her countenance as Miss Stanley exclaimed, "No, no, Lissie; I will not have those pretty locks of yours clipped. Why, you might be vainer of their sacrifice than of them. Pray, who put such an idea into your head?"

"Well, I had not thought much of them until, on my return from the prayer meeting last night, I fell into a chat with the old lady who sits in a pew nearest to our own—I do not know her name."

"Never mind, I do; but what made her mention your hair? How did she bring that subject into the conversation?"

"Why, she was contrasting Methodism as it is with what it was when she was a girl—of course, unfavourably."

"Oh, certainly; old ladies generally pet the past and depreciate the present."

"Well," continued Melissa, looking puzzled, "I cannot recollect how she brought my hair into the conversation. Because it is so rude to be personal, and yet she did not seem a bit impolite; she spoke kindly and earnestly, and seemed so grieved at my ringlets and, and"—Melissa blushed and laughed—"at, what she termed, my pretty face, calling both a snare of Satan and a device of the Enemy, that, when

I got home, I could not help looking at myself in the glass."

"And it spoke the truth, and said that you *were* pretty. And ever since someone has been so afraid of vanity that she begins to think Sister Simms in the right, and to contemplate wearing her hair cropped. Is not that it?"

"If I once believed it right to wear it plain, Miss Stanley, I would do so at once. For, indeed, I care most about being good."

"That settles the matter, Lissie. Besides, your curls are natural, and I am sure He who made them does not wish you to mar them, as long as you feel thus; with all due respect to Sister Simms, who, indeed, is a very dear old lady. Now, that is the tea-bell. Come along!"

They found Mrs. Stanley awaiting them in the parlour—a comfortable and handsomely furnished family room. As she sat behind the urn, dispensing the cheering beverage with calm, self-possessed grace, she looked quite a contrast to her bright and animated daughter. In face also, for she was straight-featured, pale, and dark-haired, and her physique denoted fragility almost amounting to feebleness, so small, slight, and drooping was she. Yet when she raised her fine dark eyes, the soul indicated its supremacy in their expression of resolute endurance and repressed energy.

A young man, whose handsome, but swarthy face indicated much shrewdness, self-control, and good-

temper, sat by her side. Miss Stanley placed a chair for Melissa next to her own, and then seated herself opposite to him.

"Well, Kynford," she said, "I suppose that dear mother and you had lost us for the last hour or two."

"Yes; we were getting quite disconsolate. I thought, at last, to seek you; but supposed you had spirited Miss Deane away on some errand of charity. In that case I knew I should be an incumbrance."

"Why so, Kynford?" inquired Mrs. Stanley, with a touch of solicitude in her tone.

"Because I am neither a woman nor an angel; in fact, mother, you had better be giving me something to do soon, or, according to Dr. Watts, I shall be in a bad way."

"You have not been idle to-day; cook tells me that you have brought home several pheasants and partridges."

"I'm so glad of that," exclaimed Sophia. "I saw poor Mrs. Morris this afternoon—you know, Kynford, she is a confirmed invalid—and she looked so ill. Her daughter was quite distressed about her, for she has not the slightest appetite, and the doctor says her strength must be kept up. I should not wonder if she were able to pick a bit of pheasant. Now, say if you are useless!"

"Special pleading, Sophia," replied he; "but I am content to have the benefit of it. Ah, if I could only have brought to Mrs. Morris, or to any other of your sick people, the air, the scope, and the landscape of the

moor, I should have been of far more use ! Dear me ! I think to be boxed up in one chamber, month after month, would soon kill me ! I should feel like a wild bird in a cage."

"They say, Kynford, that birds sing sweetest in a darkened cage. And is there not, often, more strength shown in resigning than in asserting our own way ?"

"You have shown me so, dear mother, this long time. But, seriously, I think I *could* not bear close confinement. It seems to me I would rather be shot outright than be a hopeless invalid. Miss Deane looks shocked ; Sophia, please pass her cup ; mother, let the tea be strong ; it will be more reviving."

Lissie took the tea, blushing and smiling, and replied, with gentle frankness, "Well, Mr. Kynford, I was surprised at you, but I know you did not mean what you said. I think that, perhaps, no one can tell how much God gives to compensate for what He takes away. At least, my sister used to say so, and though she did not leave her room for months before she died, I am sure that *she* was very happy."

"I have no doubt of it. You see, Miss Deane, it only comes to this ; as I said before, I am neither woman nor angel. Sophia, I wish you had been with me this afternoon."

"Why ? I fear that I should then have been useless, as I could neither shoot the game, nor bag it. Poor birdies !"

"Not at all. They have had freedom, life on the wing, joys of the nest, and the summer sunshine. Now the prisoned lark, or wood-bird, I do pity. Better a shot than a cage; that is my idea. Mother, I came across a pretty scene for 'our Roman' just now—that is what we call Sophia amongst ourselves, Miss Deane, because she is quite the artist of the family. All those paintings in the drawing-room are by her."

Lissie looked at Miss Stanley with profound admiration.

"Kynford is too partial a critic, dear," observed Sophia. "I paint just well enough to torment myself—baffled by my ideal. But, Kynford, what of this scene that struck your fancy so? because, if I liked your description of it, I might go to the moor some day with you and sketch it."

"I should certainly be indispensable, being one of the principal figures in the picture—but *one* though. I beg your pardon, mother; I have quite neglected you; let me recommend this cake; it is particularly nice. And now about the pretty view. I had walked some hours, and was making for home when I came upon it. You know one side of Stixton Moor is fringed with a wood, and this I had to cross in order to get into the road. Well, in a dip of the moor I came upon a small gipsy encampment. There were but a couple of vans, the horses from which were grazing near. The smoke from the camp-fire rose thick and dense, and the flames leapt and flickered

in the wind, looking vivid against the dark background of wood and gathering cloud. Some old witch, with a mummy-skin and imp-like eyes, was stirring the contents of a cauldron; and swarthy brats and sinister-looking men were either lying or strolling about. Upon my appearance most of the boys rose, and stared boldly at me, whilst their elders eyed me with a half-daring, half-sullen expression."

"Poor souls! Is there no one to care for them?" exclaimed Mrs. Stanley.

"It seems not, mother. Well, the hag had now disappeared, and, as I passed one of the vans, a girl came out, and saucily demanded to tell my fortune."

Mrs. Stanley looked scandalized. "My dear Kynford, surely you do not believe in such nonsense!"

"Not I, indeed! But wasn't the girl handsome? Such eyes; I could have lit my cigar at them! She beckoned me to a little distance from the van, and then I observed that, although tanned and dark as any gipsy, she did not look coarse, nor were her features of the gipsy type. She held my hand, but examined my countenance only. This roused my curiosity. 'You read faces do you?' I asked. 'Nonsense; they are frequently but masks.' 'Never quite; and yours is easy to read,' she gravely answered. And she proceeded to tell my fortune—but it was about the usual rubbish."

"Oh, you do not get out of it so, sir!" cried Miss Stanley, sparkling with animation and eagerness.

“‘In for a penny, in for a pound,’ you know—so confess all.”

“For your especial benefit, eh! My mother and Miss Deane don’t know what to think of my adventure, I see, and are quite indifferent as to the end. To please *you*, then, Sophia, I *will* confess. Well, the damsel informed me that I was in love, of course; also that I was unhappy. ‘Indeed,’ said I, interrupting her, ‘what is there you see about me so unpromising? Most people think me a jolly sort of fellow.’ She flashed a strange glance upon me, and then, to my intense astonishment, earnestly enquired, ‘Tell me, young gentleman, do *I* look happy?’ Certainly she did not, for her big, black eyes swam in tears.”

“Really, Kynford, she becomes quite interesting! But, how unlike a gipsy-girl; were you not sorry for her?”

“I suppose I was; she looked very pretty, I know. I tell you what, Sophy; if I were in love—and as she declared I was, she might have as well have told me with whom—I could not stand seeing the lady in tears—that is, if she were nice looking; crying only makes an ugly woman look worse. Now Miss Deane is laughing at me, so I will wind up.”

“‘Do you look happy?’” I repeated, “Why, not at this moment, but you look very charming.”

“Kynford!” exclaimed Mrs. Stanley.

“Well, truth never hurts, dear mother,” he replied,

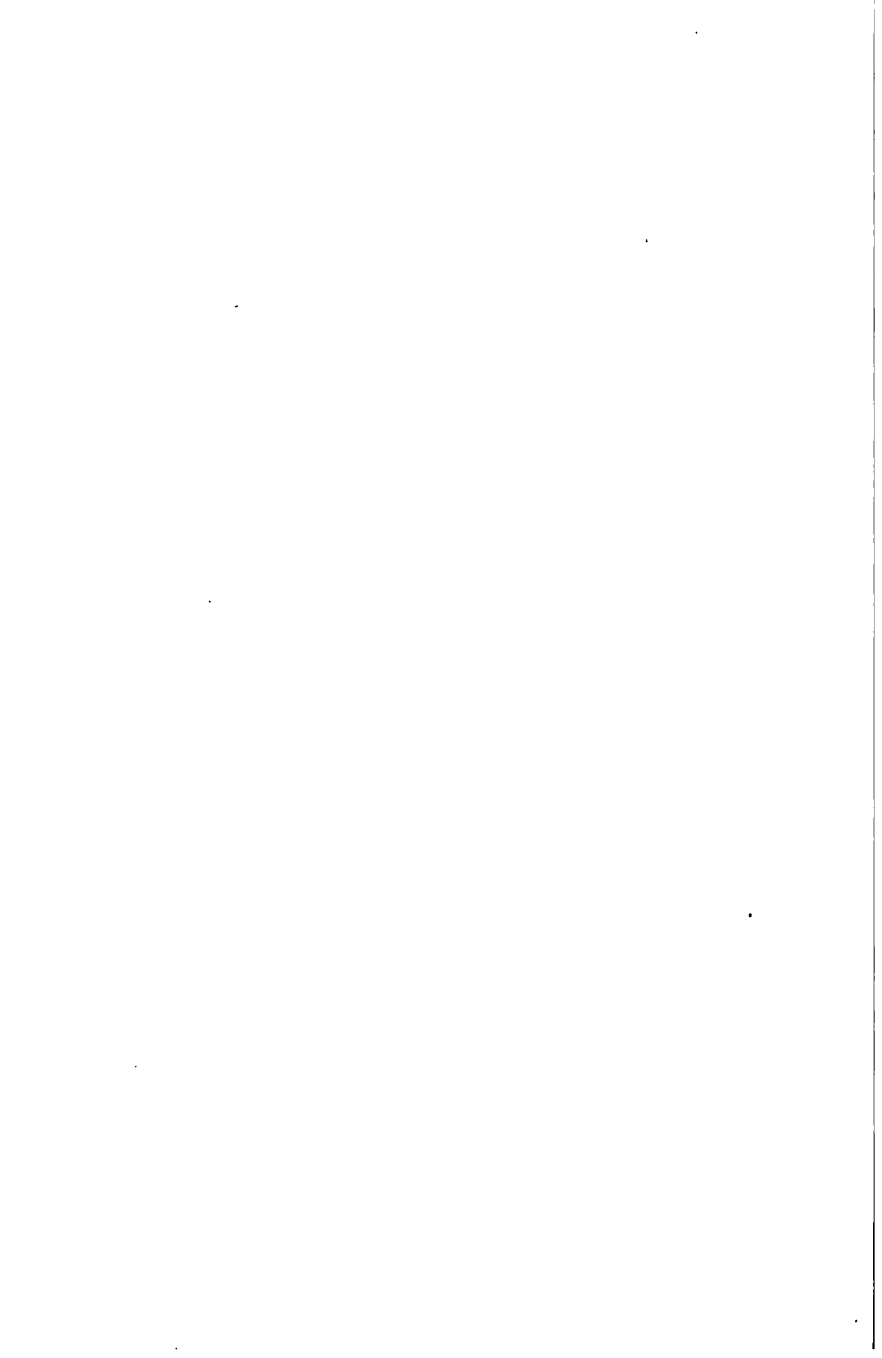
half-laughingly, half-apologetically, "and it was the truth. However, my heroine was shabby enough to take no notice of the compliment—indeed, she seemed too much in earnest to do so. 'Sir,' she said, 'I am very unhappy. I hate my life, and do not believe that I am really a gipsy, though they tell me so—especially the old woman you saw just now. She wants me to marry her son'—the girl shuddered; her face kindled; her eyes flashed; 'but,' she added, 'I will drown myself first—vile as he is!'"

Mrs. Stanley now looked irretrievably shocked, and said, with severity, "Kynford, you did *very* wrong to talk to such a girl at all; she must be a wicked creature. Please to be more careful of your self-respect for the future. Still, as you were talking to her, I hope that you put in a word in season, and showed her how wrong she was."

"I can't say that I did, mother," he steadily replied—"it isn't in my line. Besides, if wicked, she wished to be better, and *I* believe she loathed her gipsy life; had you seen her you would have thought so too. I questioned her, and she then went on to tell me that the tribe acknowledged that she was a native of Italy; and, indeed, its landscapes seemed strangely familiar to her the first time she wandered through it. 'And,' she continued, 'I have a distinct remembrance of a grand house with a terraced garden; of a lady who took me in her arms and kissed me; and I know, I feel sure, she was my mother!' She

It made me feel queer
to see her sorrowful eyes.





paused here, Sophia, and, upon my word, it made me feel queer to see her sorrowful eyes. They were sharp ones, too, for she now became aware that the old woman before mentioned was stealing towards us, and, resuming her professional manner, she held out her hand, exclaiming, 'Please remember Teresa, the gipsy, young gentleman.' I dropped into it a piece of silver; she curtsied, and joined the old woman who had now come up to us. Whistling to the dogs, I then turned away, and was soon trudging homewards along the high road. There, wasn't that a romantic adventure for a prosaic fellow like me?"

But Sophia had been listening with too intent an interest to heed the question. She turned to Mrs. Stanley. "Mother," she said, "we must do something for this girl; she must not be left to be dragged down against her will. What *can* we do for her?"

"We will make inquiries about her, my dear; what we may do will depend upon their result. But, remember, she is probably an impostor, and has this tale at the tip of her tongue. No doubt she perceived that Kynford was kind-hearted; it would not take a very clever physiognomist to see that."

"What do you think about her, Kynford?"

"I should like you to see her," was the concise reply.

"Then we will go to the camp to-morrow. The girl may speak more freely to those of her own sex. Lissie, will you come with us?"

She flushed with pleasure at the idea. A whole

morning on the moor with Miss Stanley, whom she already, with the trustful enthusiasm of youth, looked up to and loved, was a prospect greatly in contrast with a day in-doors looking over and mending the household linen! Yet was she one of that family for her own pleasure? Was not duty to her employers the first consideration? Before her colour had faded, Lissie was able to say, quite heartily, "Thank you, Miss Stanley, but I would rather stay at home."

Sophia felt surprised, but, seeing her mother's satisfied smile, made no comment. The visit to the gipsy camp was again discussed, and Kynford teased Sophia about her eagerness in the matter, declaring that if it were not for the weather—it was now raining and blowing hard—he believed that she would start for the moor at once!

"Oh! it is hard," she replied, "to be so often obliged to wait and to know in order to do good. It makes one wish for an angel's message and an angel's wings."

Her mother smiled at her bright, upturned face, and remarked, "The Almighty has kept this poor girl many years, Sophia; cannot He for another day or two?"

"All that is true, my good, wise mother; and yet—oh, I do hope it will be fine to-morrow!" said Sophia, leaving the tea-table. "Now, Kynford, will you ring the bell for Sarah?"



CHAPTER IX.

KYNFORD PUZZLES THEM.



GALE blew all that night, and the next day the rain came down so fast and steadily as to give school children no chance of performing the traditionary feat of running between the drops.

Mrs. Stanley did not make her appearance at breakfast. Her rest had been much disturbed by the violence of the storm, the more so, explained Sophia to Melissa, "as rough weather always makes her think of my poor father. He was drowned at sea, you know."

At the conclusion of the meal Sophia went to the window to ascertain if the weather were brightening. She soon returned, declaring it was so bad that it must soon improve, and that they might therefore reasonably expect a fine afternoon. "So," she added, "if we start for the moor directly after dinner there will still be time to talk to that poor Teresa, if not to take a sketch—though the

breaking up of the clouds would afford some fine effects of light and shade. But do you still think, Kynford, that her story will bear investigation? Dear mother seems to doubt it."

"Of whom will you make inquiries concerning it?" he replied, still loitering over his breakfast, as though anxious to kill time. "Because if you think you will get anything but lies out of the old gipsy, you are quite mistaken, Sophy. The point is this: does Teresa really wish to lead a respectable life? Offer her the opportunity to do so, and it will test her sincerity. That she should express such an earnest desire to abandon her present mode of living is strong evidence in her favour, for a full-blooded gipsy would loathe, and not long for a settled life and steady occupation."

"There is sense in that, certainly. I fancy it is a *bond fide* case, but there is mother's opinion to be finally consulted. Did she seem very drowsy when you took in her breakfast, Lissie?"

"Yes, very, Miss Stanley. She looked so tired that I advised her to lie this morning, and try to get a good sleep. I have told the servants to be very quiet, and perhaps you will give me necessary household directions—I would not trouble your mother for them just now."

"Oh, yes; we will manage nicely. Really, a wet day is quite a boon sometimes; we shall have no callers, and shall be able to make up ever so many arrears of work. What are *you* going to do,

Kynford?" continued Sophia, as that young gentleman at length rose from the table.

"I? Oh, I shall go and clean my guns! and then I have an account of 'Wellington's campaigns in the Peninsula' to finish. By-the-by, I should think Bonaparte must feel pretty much like a caged eagle at St. Helena."

"Were he a Prometheus chained to a rock, brother, one might pity him. Is Napoleon your hero?" and Sophia spoke with some scorn.

Kynford slightly coloured. "He is not; yet I cannot but pity him; remember that he made himself as much beloved by his friends as feared by his enemies. And might not I do worse than take Napoleon as my model? At least he has genius, and the fascination of indomitable will and energy; you cannot deny that, Sophy?"

She did not respond verbally, but came to him as he leant against the back of Mrs. Stanley's high, carved chair, and, putting her hand upon his shoulder, looked at him earnestly.

Melissa slipped out, and Kynford taking Sophia's hand into his own, and meeting the dark eyes now so expressive, said sorrowfully, "Yes, I know what you mean; but I am *not* good—I believe it is natural for women to be."

"Ah, brother, it is not natural for any one to be good, but if you would only take Christ as your ideal, looking unto Him, you would become like

Him. What is it, Kynford?" For he had looked up with a vehement quickness.

"To be good we must love God best of all," he affirmed, "that is in the First Commandment, I believe. Now it strikes me, Sophy, that many people imagine that they love Him best when, in reality, an idol is set up in their hearts all the while. And sometimes the Almighty suddenly proves this to them."

"It is so, indeed. There! I knew that you thought of these things more than you appeared to. Yet some do love God more than any human being. Look at our little Lissie, what she has suffered for His sake!"

"She has not yet renounced all for duty," replied Kynford, with decision. "But who am I, to pick faults in those so much better than myself? Well, good morning, Sophia." And kissing the hand that he had retained, he sauntered into the adjoining library.

"That is not the place in which to clean guns," thought Sophia, "but it is a quiet one in which to read and think. I fancy—in fact, I feel sure—that he is not at all happy. It may be a sign for good. Oh, I am sure that our Father will gather him into His kingdom yet!"

At dinner-time it rained as steadily as ever, but Sophia seemed so bent upon going to the moor to see Teresa in spite of the bad weather, that Mrs. Stanley was obliged formally to forbid any going

out of doors for the day. Upon which her daughter, with a pretty air of desperation, declared "that she wished she were a gentleman, so that in great-coat and gaiters she might be independent of weather!"

"In that case," replied Kynford, who was busy converting his walnut shells into a fleet of liliputian ships, "in that case you would lose more than half your power of doing good to the sick, the fallen, and the dispirited. Take comfort, however; we may pretty safely rely upon a fine day to-morrow."

"Why, brother, the gipsies may be miles away by that time. However, mother is right; God is still with Teresa, and we must trust her to Him." And then Sophia settled cheerfully to her needlework for the remainder of the afternoon.

Oh, how it would have comforted the kidnapped Italian girl, could she but have known what kind hearts were interested in her! How often, too, did *we* but know God's thoughts and intentions, would it comfort us in dark days. Let us, at any rate, trust in them.

After tea the ladies drew round the fire, which threw its ruddy glow over earnest faces and industrious fingers. Mrs. Stanley was, as usual, knitting, Sophia was working at a handsome fire-screen, and Melissa was making a silk patchwork cushion, destined to help fill the large basket at her side, already containing many useful and ornamental articles, the sale of which was to swell the

mission funds. Kynford, who was standing behind Sophia's chair, and who looked terribly bored by the long, wet day, watched the nimble movement of the needles in the little white hands, listened to the earnest consultation as to silks and wools matching, &c., and at length gave a prodigious yawn.

"Why haven't they invented some useful employment like that for gentlemen on wet days?" he exclaimed, "though, to be sure, I should prefer something rather more lively myself. I fear I should be apt to keep up a sort of pedal accompaniment all the while to my hands, which would not, I suppose, help them. But, really, you ladies are so vastly industrious, it makes a poor fellow feel ashamed of himself."

"If you have nothing else to do, you might read to us," observed Mrs. Stanley.

Kynford looked comically dismayed. "Like the minister at your Dorcas meetings, I suppose, mother?"

"You might follow a worse example," she smilingly replied.

"If you are very hard up for employment you may hold this skein of wool for me to wind," gaily remarked Sophia, "and as it is for some work I am doing for the missionary basket, you will thus have the satisfaction of feeling that you, too, are doing some good."

A light came into the young man's firm, though listless face, as he stepped forward and took the crimson skein from Miss Stanley's hands. But,

somehow, he held it so awkwardly that ere long it dropped and became entangled, and though he apologized, he yet did it so laughingly that Sophia declared he could not be sorry, and that Miss Deane should take his place. He, however, would not relinquish the wool, and submitted very quietly to having it again arranged upon his hands by Sophia, who then began quickly to wind it, playfully scolding him for his awkwardness, which, indeed, rendered it necessary that her deft little fingers should often come into contact with what he termed his "ugly paws," in order to disentangle the contrary skein. He listened smilingly to her, looking down, but now and then giving her an upward glance that Melissa thought queer, for if the lips betrayed fun there was fire in the dark eyes. Why did the mouth alone express mirth?

Indeed, she could not make him out, nor did his next remark assist her to do so. For suddenly he turned to Mrs. Stanley—oblivious of the wool, which snapped from the abrupt movement—and gravely inquired: "Mother, what do you say to my becoming a missionary?"

Mrs. Stanley, who before had been looking very thoughtful, seemed painfully startled by this question. "Kynford!" she exclaimed, with energy, "Kynford, I would not have you leave me, I would not trust you to the perils of the sea"—she shuddered—"and of a wandering life to be anything *but* that. Say, do you really wish it?"

With what an agitated face she looked at him, all its usual calmness broken up! And as Kynford looked down into it, read the tenderness and tumult in the large hazel eyes, saw their sparkle of triumph half quenched in tears, and the intense maternal love expressed in the whole countenance, the smile faded from his own. He stooped and kissed her brow.

"Don't fret; I'll not leave you, dear mother," he said, soothingly. "No, not even for the chance of regaling the Fijians with cooked missionary. It was an idle question, and must have seemed a thoughtless one. Please think no more of it." Then, as Mrs. Stanley still looked troubled, and by no means satisfied by his assurances, he continued, "I mean it, indeed, mother; though I have been such a lounging, purposeless idler of late; it is no wonder that you doubt me. But you know it takes a good deal of the spur to get me into a gallop; that once done, you'll see how I'll go."

Sophia gave Kynford a few keen glances whilst he ran on in this random way. She seemed to detect some purpose behind his careless manner, and she continued the bantering tone he had adopted.

"You are not wanted to go, sir, but to stay, allow me to tell you! And you will also atone for the mischief you have done to my unfortunate skein by standing perfectly still while I finish winding it, under penalty of being fastened to a chair by a cotton-end, like a naughty boy! Lissie

why do you laugh? Don't you think he deserves punishment?"

Shy little Lissie, however, could express no opinion upon the subject, for Kynford had fixed his eyes—now merry and mischievous as a boy's—full upon her, and, as yet, she stood in some awe of this handsome, but inexplicable young gentleman. And this evening, too, he seemed to be unusually erratic. For, presently, when Mrs. Stanley again asked him to read aloud to them, he did not immediately reply to her, but seemed to be absorbed in watching Sophia's needle, as it moved quickly in and out of the frame. He was silent from thought alone, however, and when Mrs. Stanley looked up at him in surprise, he anticipated its expression by exclaiming, with a roguish look, "Will I read aloud to the ladies? With pleasure, mother, if they will only allow me the choice of a book."

"Pray remember that sermons are not suitable at Dorcas meetings," said Sophia, with mock apprehension; "*we* shall like something entertaining—travels or poems."

"Really, now! I am sorry that I can't oblige you, Sophia." Then in a hurried, but decided tone, he added, "Mother, it is all settled. I have determined to accept my uncle's offer, and shall commence my legal studies at once. I shall therefore be compelled to edify you with a little from Blackstone—unless, indeed, you prefer that I should

go at him in the library—make up for lost time, I must. You do not appreciate the idea of Blackstone, I see, so I will adjourn to the next room immediately.” And without waiting to perceive the impression that he had made, Kynford hastily left.

Mrs. Stanley and her daughter interchanged looks of delight. “Impulsive boy,” exclaimed the former, “not even to wait to be thanked. But he shall not get out of it so.”

“There, mother! I knew that he would consent at last,” gleefully replied Sophia. “Like most men, he will do things in his own way, and in his own time; but when he once begins he will do them well. And how pleased uncle Josiah will be!”

“Yes; Kynford is a dear boy; if my own son, he could not love me or study my wishes more. Were he but a Christian, indeed, I should die happy!”

“Oh, mother dear, that will be all right! This sacrifice of his own wish to ours is an earnest of future good.” And Sophia worked at the gay bouquet that was growing under her hands, with a happy smile upon her bright, expressive face.

Melissa, necessarily a quiet listener, had looked up from her work in surprise when Mrs. Stanley had spoken last. “If her own son!” Was Mr. Kynford, then, only her step-son, and was Sophia his half-sister? Strange that no one had ever mentioned this!


There was now a long silence, for each of the ladies seemed absorbed in her own thoughts. At length, Mrs. Stanley looked up, and said quietly, "Do you know, Sophy, I feel perplexed about Kynford this evening. There may be more in this sudden decision of his than appears. Will you tell him, my dear, that I will see him in the library in an hour's time. Meanwhile, you may relate to Miss Deane—I saw that she looked puzzled just now—all that we know of his history. She is already sufficiently one of us to justify her knowing it; besides, it will be pleasanter to her. I will come down to supper if I feel well enough; if not," addressing Melissa, "perhaps you will come to my room the last thing." Then, drawing her shawl around her, Mrs. Stanley went to think over the meaning of Kynford's conduct, and the consequent course she should pursue, in the solitude of her chamber. For, as Sophia said, "My mother never comes to a decision until she has taken counsel of God."





CHAPTER X.

NEWS.

OPHIA went into the library, gave her message to Kynford, and returned to the parlour with the report that he was buried in his book, and had merely nodded in reply to her. "And I am glad, Lissie," she continued, "that I may tell you about him. Did you think that he and I were brother and sister?"

"I took that for granted; and yet I had noticed that there was no resemblance in him to either you or Mrs. Stanley. But if not her son, whose is he, if I may ask?"

"You may; but it is more than I can answer, my dear; he is a foundling, and how he came to be found is a bit of romance in real life. I will tell you all about it.

"One Christmas eve, about twenty years ago, my parents were returning from a long walk, and when about a mile from the town, they heard the crying

of an infant in the direction of a large pond they were then approaching, Kynford Pond—yes, it is from that my foster-brother has his name. Feeling alarmed, they searched, and soon discovered amongst the bushes, which on one side grew down to the water's edge, a dear little baby, wailing feebly, as if almost exhausted. It made my mother's heart ache to hear it; the more so, as she had just lost her own baby-boy."

"And what did she do?" eagerly inquired Melissa.

"Why, she took up the poor thing, all blue with the cold, and tried to hush it. It seemed to know that it was in a mother's arms, for it soon became quiet, and then began to move its head eagerly about for nourishment. The pretty movement, the touch of the tiny hands, and the look of the dark eyes, so like those of her own dead baby, were too much for my mother, and, turning decisively to my father—who looked half-puzzled and half-alarmed—'Robert,' she cried, 'I must take the child home; it will perish here.' But he objected to this; his plan was to leave it at a cottage they would pass on their way home, with people whom they knew, to have it fed and warmed, and then taken to the workhouse.

"Now, whilst my parents were discussing the point, master baby had fallen asleep, nestling into the warmth under my mother's cloak. Well, she obtained her own way, carried him home, and in the evening, called my father to come and look at him as

he lay wide awake in my little brother's cradle, dressed in some of his raiment. Too young to be frightened at strangers, when baby saw the candle, it stretched out its pretty hands towards the light, and crowed with pleasure. 'It is a bonny bairn,' said my father, smiling:

"'Robert,' replied my mother, 'it is God's Christmas gift to us. Dare we send it to the workhouse?'

"He was touched; he hesitated; yet one must be practical in this world, and after a thoughtful pause, he decidedly objected to adopt it, alleging that the child's parents were probably thieves or tramps, and that therefore he himself might give us no end of trouble when he grew up, for what is bred in the bone will never out of the flesh; that, in fact, to adopt it would be to do a very romantic, and therefore, an absurd thing.

"'But,' pleaded my mother, 'I doubt if both its parents were of the class you mentioned, for its clothes were of fine material—and observe how good featured it is.' However, my father did not want to look at the baby, it shook his resolve too much; so he beat a hasty retreat from the cradle, exclaiming, crossly, 'My dear, it is like your kind heart to wish to keep the child, but I tell you it won't *do*. Let it be taken to the workhouse to-morrow.'

"At this fiat, my mother turned away, silent for a few moments, with utter disappointment. Then, in a quiet, dejected tone, she replied, 'Very well Robert, let it be so. But the poor thing must go at

once: I cannot bear to see it, if I may not keep it—'tis so much like my own. Oh, baby, baby!' And she burst into tears. This perplexed my father more than all. He could not stand seeing his usually placid wife in such passionate grief, and yet his judgment was still unconvinced. So he compromised matters, kissed my mother, and told her that she might keep it then—for a few days at least. By-the-by, Lissie, if you want to have your own way there is nothing like getting in the thin end of the wedge—mind that!"

Melissa met Sophia's roguish eyes with a look of amused comprehension, and then inquired, "Did it answer in this case, Miss Stanley?"

"Perfectly. My mother, being a wise woman, was content with the present concession, and said no more. After that night, the baby pleaded his own cause more effectually than any one else could have done, for my father became as fond of it as could be desired, formally adopted it, and insisted upon its receiving its name from the pond by which it was found. And I am sure that Kynford has been to us all that a real son and brother could possibly be."

"And does he believe that he is one of the family by blood, Miss Stanley?"

"Not now, dear. He did until three years ago, just before my father sailed for China, where his presence was required, owing to the death of his partner, residing there. It was a painful surprise to Kynford,

poor boy, when he heard the circumstances I have just related to you, and for some time he remained quite silent."

Melissa looked up wonderingly.

"It was from no want of gratitude," explained Sophia, "but that a shock is apt to silence a strong nature; it is only weak-minded women and children who complain. And when Kynford at length spoke, he merely said, in slow accents, 'So I have no parents—no home!' Of course, my father hastened to assure him that he had been, and always would be, as his own son to him, and then Kynford grasped his hand, expressed his gratitude in a few short earnest sentences, and again became silent. They were returning from a summer evening's walk, and as they entered the house together and crossed the hall, my mother heard their steps and beckoned Kynford into the library, where I, too, had been expecting his return. She was agitated, threw her arms around his neck, and exclaimed! 'Kynford, you will let it make no difference; you will still and always be as my own boy?' He held her close, kissed her warmly, but still remained silent. This troubled my mother, and she repeated her question in a quick, pained way. I shall never forget, Lissie, his look or his manner, as he replied, 'Yes, mother; if you will have me as one; and may God forget me, if ever I, knowingly, cause you a moment's pain!' Then he chid her gently for imagining that what he had now been told could do

ought but increase his affection for her—if that were possible.

“‘So you will not feel orphaned and homeless, my boy?’ she said. He smiled and inquired how that could be, when he had never known any home but this? Nevertheless, she never knew what Kynford had said when the knowledge of his real parentage first broke upon him, for he begged my father not to mention it to her, pleading, as a reason, that she would most certainly misunderstand his meaning.

“Everything then went on as before until my father sailed. But, Lissie, the ship was wrecked on its homeward voyage, and he was amongst the drowned. This happened two years ago, and my mother has not yet recovered from the shock it caused her; indeed, she is so frail I fear sometimes that she will never be well again. The very thought of risking Kynford upon the sea upset her quite beyond her powers of concealment. What could have made him so careless this evening as to mention voyaging to her even in jest, I cannot imagine, for he is usually so considerate, and as steady as old Time. Though once he certainly did show a roving, restless spirit—wished very much to become a soldier or a sailor—and when this was forbidden him, he begged hard that he might accompany my father to China.”

“Why, in that case, Mrs. Stanley would have lost both her husband and foster-son,” said Melissa.

“Yes, but fortunately she would not hear of his

going, and he gave up the idea quite cheerfully, and, of course, after my father's death, his leaving us was quite out of the question. Still, he could not bring himself to settle down to any business, or profession, though my uncle, who is a solicitor, wished him to become one also, with a view of taking him, ultimately, into partnership. Much as we desired this arrangement, my mother did not wish to force a profession upon Kynford, and therefore left him free to decide in the matter. So you may imagine, dear, how pleased we were, just now, when he voluntarily announced his intention to commence his legal studies at once."

"It was no wonder, I'm sure! What a good thing it was your mother *did* adopt him."

"It was, indeed, Lissie. But, hark! Surely that was a visitor's knock? Who can it be to-night? Why enough rain has fallen to float the ark—almost!"

The mystery was soon and satisfactorily solved by the announcement of "Mrs. Gow," who entered divested of her out-door apparel, and looking as soberly serene as though it were particularly natural to make calls involving an eight miles' coach ride in such weather, and at such a time.

Sophia rose and quickly came forward, with a beaming face. "Why, cousin!" she cried, "who would have thought of seeing you? But I'm so glad you are here—and mother will be delighted! I need not introduce you to Miss Deane, I think."

"No, Sophy, we have met before," quietly replied

Mrs. Gow, as she shook hands with Melissa. "You need not be surprised to see me *here*, my dear," she continued, "I told you that I had friends in Linchester. Mrs. Stanley is my second cousin."

"I am very pleased to meet you again," replied Melissa, with gentle cordiality, as she placed her chair by the fire. "And, Miss Stanley, you must pardon me if I ask whether it is through Mrs. Gow's kind recommendation that I am now one of this family?"

"It is, dear. My cousin saw you at Mr. Sorfleet's, and from what you told her, and, I may add, from your care-worn appearance also, pretty accurately inferred how matters stood with you at your home. She mentioned you to us, and we—requiring some one to assist in the house-keeping, and having the greatest confidence in her sagacity—wrote to you at once; and right glad we are to have you with us. Was your trouble very hard to bear sometimes, Lissie?"

Now this was the first allusion to Melissa's trials for conscience sake that had been made to her, and the tone of sympathy in which it was uttered touched her much. She had thought herself uncomprehended, except by God; but it seemed that human hearts also had both understood and felt sorry for her. Pity she did not want—indeed, some forms of it are disagreeably akin to contempt—but sympathy arising from fellow-feeling is always precious. Yet Melissa would allow no shadow of blame upon her

family, and therefore it was with a more reticent manner than usual that she replied, "I was no martyr, dear Miss Stanley, but I *am* very glad to be able to worship God in the way I think best."

"I am sure of it. And now, cousin," continued Sophia, addressing Mrs. Gow, "you must please to relieve my mind as to the cause of your very welcome, but certainly unexpected appearance here to-night. There is nothing amiss at home, I trust?"

"No, thank God! The master is quite well—or he was; he had not returned from a circuit-meeting when I left. The boys are hearty as ever, and happy—Paul especially." And Mrs. Gow's sensible, well-controlled face expanded into a smile.

"Yes, of course; and what of his bride?"

"Oh, she's a clever, managing, little woman; she'll do."

"On Paul's authority?"

"No, on my own. Seth's first-born was christened last Sunday; and Sam is looking very sweet upon Farmer Grey's youngest daughter. She'll have a nice little nest-egg, I think, and, what's more, is none of your flaunting, flighty lasses, but goes to chapel and class regularly, and minds her work at home."

"Really, cousin, I think that your sons must have a receipt for choosing good partners! I should like to know it."

"Sophy, it is just this," replied Mrs. Gow, with impressive earnestness; "you should choose a

husband, or a wife, as you would a new garment, for wear and not for show. But here am I bragging over my boys like a hen cackling over a new-laid egg. You'll be sure to come over to Stixton next week to the missionary meeting, I suppose."

"We would not miss being there on any account. But you have not yet told us the cause of your coming here to-night. I must confess to being curious to know, and a little anxious?"

"Ah, then, you can guess it!" replied Mrs. Gow, putting her feet upon the fender to warm, and carefully folding her dress back to prevent it being scorched. "Have you seen anything of Sally?"

"Oh," exclaimed Sophia, clasping her hands in a pretty, appealing way, "don't say that she has run away!"

"She's an ungrateful girl," was the stern response. "She slipped off early this morning; but I soon missed her, and, luckily, was just in time to take the coach for Linchester. I hardly thought that she would have the face to show herself here, yet I would not seek her at her own home until I had seen you. She is your affair, you know."

"I am so sorry she has caused you all this trouble: she is a sad naughty girl, and yet I do not like to give her up. Still, if she will go on in this way, I have no right to trouble my friends with her. Lissie, you have heard me speak of Sally Brown? Well, Mrs. Gow's is the second place in which I have put her, and from which she has run away;

and yet for her to remain in her wretched home will be her ruin."

"H'm; if it has not been already," observed Mrs. Gow. "The fact is, Sophy, the girl loves dress and hates work."

"We must see what can be done," returned Sophia, thoughtfully. "No doubt Sally is at home, and to-morrow I must see her. Lissie, my cousin will stay with us to-night—will you kindly have the blue chamber prepared for her, and tell cook to bring in some refreshment at once?"

Melissa left the room to execute these commissions, and then Mrs. Gow and Sophia entered into a freer chat about family affairs than they could do in the presence of one who, however much they esteemed her, was yet not a relative.





CHAPTER XI.

FROM TRUE LOVE.

DURING the conversation just related Mrs. Stanley had joined Kynford in the library. Upon her entrance he rose, placed her in a chair, drew her shawl carefully round her, and then, seating himself by her side, inquired, "Has the dear mater come specially to see me?"

"Yes, my boy, I have. I wish to know if you have fully considered your choice of a profession? Because you certainly seemed to have come to a decision very suddenly."

"I dare say I did, mother. But it is all right: I will hold to it, never fear. With all my faults, I'm not a fickle fellow."

"I suppose not. You smile—what is it?"

"Ask Sophia if I'm fickle? She will say I *know* Kynford is not."

"I beg your pardon, Kynford"—for the flush had mounted to his brow—"I by no means intended

to imply that you were. Now another question : Have you decided upon the legal profession against your will, and only from love to us ?”

Again the young man flushed, and, for a moment or two, hesitated. Then a quick light of perception brightened his face, and in grave, firm tones he replied, “I have chosen it of my own free will, *and* from true love, dear mother. Does that satisfy you ?”

“It does, indeed. Still, I have one more thing to say ; it has cost me much to be able to say it, but God forbid that I should withhold from Him, His own dear gift—for such you are. Mind, Kynford, if you *do* feel called to the life of a missionary—and there is a daring as well as a gentleness in your disposition that would certainly qualify you for such a life, and may therefore draw you to it—if, I repeat, you wish to serve God in this way—say so, for I would then renounce you—yes, if it cost me my life to do it !”

Kynford met her dark, brilliant eyes that glowed from out the pallor of her face, so intense and yet so calm, and he seemed deeply moved. “Mother,” he exclaimed, “I do not deserve such love—good-for-nothing fellow as I am ! Truly, if woman tempted us from Eden she atones by winning us to a better Paradise.” Then, with a quick change of manner, “But, come now, make that tender heart easy ; for it is a fact, mother—and don’t be shocked—it is a fact, that I should be much more likely to shoot the

savages than to preach to them—especially if they should turn bumptious. Is that a qualification for a missionary?”

Mrs. Stanley could not help smiling at his odd way of putting the matter, and yet, though unutterably relieved at his decision, she was somewhat grieved and disappointed at the light way in which he treated so serious a subject. With that quick instinct of his he perceived this, and observed, in answer to her unspoken thought, “It is not necessary to be a minister, or a missionary, in order to be a Christian, I think, mother dear, and I may yet be that—some day.”

“Why not now, Kynford? Will it be easier to trust your Saviour to-morrow, or next year, than now? Besides, it is the only time of which you are sure.”

This remark was succeeded by rather a long silence, during which Kynford’s face clouded into deep gravity. At length he said, with a distinct decisiveness of manner that was almost stern, “Mother, you must have patience with me; I am doing my best; that I always *will* do.”

“Ah, my boy, we are more than satisfied with your affection for us—if you could but love God as much! For I do want to see you safe in the fold.”

“I will do my best,” he hurriedly repeated, “what more can I?” Then, in a gentle tone, “I cannot permit any more talking now, dear mother, for you

are both tired and excited. You must try to sleep better to-night; the storm is nearly spent, and it will, I believe, be fine to-morrow. Good night, if I do not see you at supper." And, kissing her on the forehead, Kynford left the room, and went to his chamber.

When there, having taken no light, he walked at once to the window, and drew up the blind. As he had said, the storm was nearly over; the rain had ceased, but there was still a high wind, and the clouds were broken up into tumultuous, drifting masses that, with hurrying movement, now obscured and now revealed the light of the moon. And as Kynford gazed out, with folded arms, upon the quiet fields and troubled sky, there was in his heart wild chaos indeed.

"Must I do it?" he thought. "Can I chain myself to an occupation I hate; can I put my whole nature into a strait jacket, and yet be happy? And if not, what then? Selfish fellow! To whom do you owe life, love, duty—all you have and are—if not to those who took the child of sin and shame, and cherished it in very truth as their own? You can at least show yourself grateful to them, I suppose! No more grumbling, Kynford! You are to study for the law, and stick to it as though you liked it beyond everything.

"Yes; I spoke the truth; I did choose the profession from 'true love,' for will it not keep me near Sophia, who calls me 'brother?' Thank God, I am not,

nor do I love her as one! But I must not frighten her from her sweet, sisterly freedom and security—although we are made for each other—else why should Sophy understand both my speech and my silence better than any other in the house! Wouldn't she make a capital missionary's wife—and I'd be a missionary, or anything else to win her love—for there is pluck and power enough in her to supply half a dozen ordinary women. How can *I* ever be good enough for her! She is an angel, and I think so twenty times a day. Yet not quite; she is proud. I doubt if she would accept the castaway for a husband, though she does—as she cannot help it—for a brother.

“Yet it was not *my* fault. Mother—oh, who is my *own* mother, on whom I have a natural claim for home and love? Well, whoever she is, she forsook me, and to the stranger who rescued me belong both love and gratitude. No, I will not leave her; indeed she will not have me do so. I tested her this evening, and she cannot let me go, though every pulse and power of my being seem to clamour for freedom, for a wild and roving life of daring adventure, of peril—anything rather than the prosaic level, the monotonous common-place of ordinary life. But to leave mother would be cruel; *she* cannot renounce me, and here—seeing Sophia every day—I cannot conquer my love for her, though I may hide it.

“Yes, that Italian girl was right; I am not happy.

I need not mask my face out on the moor, and I suppose the strong compulsion of my nature leaves its impress. Poor Teresa ; what a wretched life have I been saved from ! By heaven ! if I cannot *be* all they wish—and I cannot love God whom I have not seen better than Sophia whom I have—I will try to *do* everything they wish. I know what I have set myself, and I *will* do it."





CHAPTER XII.

SOPHIA AND SALLY.

THE next day being bright and frosty, it was settled that as soon as possible after breakfast they should all drive to Stixton Moor—Mrs. Gow excepted. For no persuasion could induce that careful lady to become one of the party, as not only had she sundry household matters upon her mind, but also the fear that her “good man” might make his appearance, in order to ascertain that all was right with the wife who had left her home so promptly and unexpectedly. “He would, of course, fully trust her judgment and discretion,” she explained, “but nothing fidgeted her Adam more than to come home and find her absent, for men were like fish out of water without their wives. Not that they make much of us to our faces, my dear,” she continued, addressing Mrs. Stanley, “as I dare say you know, but they can’t do without us, that’s certain!”

Happy in this consciousness, and with a sober

satisfaction at having left the delinquent Sally with those perfectly able to manage her, Mrs. Gow took her seat in the coach for Stixton, a small, country town about eight miles from Linchester.

How often are we disappointed in that which we have anticipated with the most pleasure! When, after a delightful drive, the Stanleys came to that part of the moor where the gipsies had encamped, they found them gone; and though, judging from the smouldering remains of their fire, they had left recently, still there was now no chance of doing anything for Teresa, as it was impossible to know in what direction they had moved. There was nothing for it but to turn the horses' heads, and drive homewards.

Sophia was especially disappointed at this termination of her project. Her will was baffled, as well as her benevolence, and she began bitterly to condemn herself for not having braved the wild weather of the previous day, and seen Teresa in spite of it.

This outburst of feeling elicited a gentle rebuke from Mrs. Stanley. "I believe, my dear," she added, "that I forbade your going; am I therefore to blame?"

"Oh, mother, I did not mean that; you might have known that I did not! But I am so vexed."

"With whom, Sophia? Do you not see that this matter is taken entirely out of our hands, and we must leave Teresa to God? We can but pray for her."

"You are always right, mother; yet, I cannot but wish that I had known of Teresa before. Oh, how much misery is around us of which we are ignorant!"

"Did we see it all, my child, it might take from us the energy to do even that good which is within our reach."

"If it will be any comfort to you, Sophy, remarked Kynford, who had expressed no feeling of any sort, "I may tell you that Teresa seemed to have an uncommon spirit of her own, as determined as it was daring. Then, too, she is inured to her life, and what she cannot break from she will bear, depend upon it."

"And now what is to be done about Sally?" inquired Melissa. "You have quite forgotten her, I fear."

Sophia brightened at once. Here was some good that she *could* do. "Oh!" she replied, with a return of her natural animation, "I shall see her this very afternoon. If I wait until the evening her father may be at home, and he is a dreadful man. I am quite afraid of him."

"If there is the least chance of your seeing Mr. Brown, I shall accompany you, Sophia," said Kynford. "It is not right that you should venture among those low people unprotected."

"I shall be very glad of your company, brother, but, don't come merely to please me; Sally's father is sure not to be in until night."

"Why are you so afraid of him, Miss Stanley?" asked Melissa.

"Because he is half crazy with drink and drugs. One day, Lissie, soon after I had induced Mrs. Gow to take Sally as a servant, her father came and detained me in the hall talking for half an hour. Now Kynford was out, mamma in bed, and the servants in the back premises. I asked the man to come into the kitchen, and say what he wished to there. He, however, would not budge, but, on the contrary, began violently to harangue me, accusing me of conspiring against him to ruin his home, of robbing him of his daughter, of setting her against him, and demanded to have her sent back at once. At last he talked so incoherently and looked so wild, playing with a knife which he had suddenly produced, that I began to feel frightened."

"Oh! what did you do? I should have screamed."

"No, you would not, Lissie. Loss of self-control in one often calms the other. I kept a steady eye upon him, and talked to him soothingly until Kynford entered, when Mr. Brown found himself summarily dismissed."

"Yes; and he had better not show himself there again," remarked Kynford, with a look that belied his quiet tone. "It seems to me you are taking a great deal of trouble about an ungrateful lot, Sophy."

"As such they have the more need of it," she replied, quickly. "But Mr. Brown's is a hopeless case—for me, at any rate: you see, he has just enough conscience and culture to drive him to drink again in his sober, sane moments, poor fellow! His wife, too, I fear, has taken to opium-eating, and it is not to be wondered at. She is a broken-down, dejected creature, but is anxious for her daughter to do well, and it was quite with her sanction that I sent Sally from home."

"How foolish she is to run away from her places when she has such a wretched home!" exclaimed Melissa.

"Yes; but it is in consequence of the lawlessness of her past life that she now so much resents restraint. She is a pretty girl, unfortunately, and fond of cheap finery. Oh, she must not remain at home, must she, mother?"

"No, my dear; we will certainly do all we can for Sally. Kynford, will you tell Thomas to drive into the city to Mr. Josiah Stanley's? We must not defer an hour telling your uncle of your recent decision; he will be so delighted. And then we can stay to lunch."

"And I shall also be much nearer Mrs. Brown's; it will be a good arrangement," said Sophia.

Kynford did as he had been directed, but made no comment upon the "good arrangement." And when Sophia rallied him upon his silence, he quietly replied, "That they must not be surprised

if they did occasionally find him in a brown study, with Blackstone on the brain." Whereupon Mrs. Stanley hoped that he would not work too hard and injure his health; and Sophia declared that she would not allow him to, for he would have to be her cavalier at several forthcoming Missionary and Bible Society meetings, to be followed by Christmas festivities, when there would be plenty of recreation for him in assisting her to decorate the schoolrooms, and so on.

"Sophy knows I'm a good-natured fellow, mother, and that she has only to hold up her finger for me to follow her. Will she get a husband as docile as her brother, I wonder?"

"Oh, dear, no! The order will then be reversed, and I shall have to follow him; so at present a brother is far more convenient."

"She is a saucy girl, Kynford; but she will meet with her master some day," said Mrs. Stanley, smiling. "Now Thomas is stopping, and I see your uncle at the office window. Let *me* tell him, Kynford."

"With pleasure, dear mother," replied that gentleman. And then he gravely conducted her into the house.

In the afternoon, Sophia, accompanied by Melissa, sought the run-a-way at her home, which was in a low neighbourhood, and one of a row of dilapidated houses in a close, crowded court. Mrs. Brown, a limp, lugubrious looking woman, came to

the door in answer to Sophia's knock, coloured deeply on recognizing one of her visitors, and then, with an air of resignation, put her the only chair, and motioned Melissa to a box placed against the wall. The room was smoke-blackened and squalid, with an unswept floor, a diminutive fire smouldering in a rusty grate, and a hearth covered with raked-out ashes; whilst the one small table was littered with crusts, herring bones, and sloppy cups and plates. Sally, a pretty, though rather sullen looking girl, glanced at the two ladies as they entered, but said nothing, and assumed a defiant defensiveness of attitude and expression. Sophia nodded, just spoke to her, and then addressed the mother.

"How are you to-day, Mrs. Brown? I have brought a friend of mine, Miss Deane, to see you."

"Thank you, Miss, but I don't see as it's much use; it seems to me no one can do us any good." And the woman smoothed her apron with a down-cast, despondent look.

"That all depends, Mrs. Brown. How has your husband been lately? Has he any work now?"

"He has had some odds and ends 'm; but no one likes to give him regular employment, nor can they, seeing as how he won't work regular at anything. I goes out charin' when I can, or it's little we should have to put in our mouths. But you knows all about it, and I wouldn't be complainin'."

"Yes, I know," replied Sophia, gently. "But you are not alone; Sally is a big, useful girl now, and she helps you all she can. Of course, she does not take the bread from her mother?"

Sally flushed, but still remained silent, and Mrs. Brown, twiddling the corner of her apron, replied, apologetically, "Well, Miss, you see Sally's young, and she's got a spirit; and the young' uns like to have their fling a bit, I s'pose."

"Yes; but who is to pay for it, Mrs. Brown?"

"Father says I can earn enough to keep me like a lady," now wrathfully broke out Sally. "And he's going to look out a place for me as barmaid at a public, where I shan't have no dirty work, and shall dress fit to be seen."

"Sally!" exclaimed her mother, "mind your manners, gal, and don't talk that way. I'm sure it's been very good of Miss Stanley to take such pains with you. And you know she even helped herself to rig ye out for your place, so that you *might* be fit to be seen—it wasn't much to speak of that you had before, ye mind."

Sally glanced at the simple, but neat dress that she wore, and the recollection of Sophia's kindness touched her. "Well, mother," she replied, in a half-softened, half-sullen tone, "I knew Miss Stanley had given me up for a bad 'un because she scarce said a word to me, and it made me kind o' wild. For, you see, Miss, I did try to stay at Mrs. Gow's, just to please you; but father said I weren't

to stay if I did not like it—and I didn't—I couldn't abide it!"

"Why not, Sally? I am sure Mrs. Gow is a very good, kind woman."

"And so she may be, Miss; I don't say she isn't. But, la! it were mortally dull there; nothing but work, work, work, and chapel-goin' for a change! Dirty work, too: washin' dishes, scourin' saucepans, siftin' cinders, and sich like. Ugh!"

Sophia glanced significantly at the unswept hearth and then at Sally, who coloured vividly and looked down as the former continued: "Have you, then, forgotten all that we talked about the other day? Ah, Sally, I am afraid that your mother is very much disappointed in you! She had a good home once; cannot you help her to have one again?—though I fear if you earned money it would all go in finery—false lace, sham jewellery, and so on."

"What, then, Miss? Mayn't poor girls look nice as well as young ladies?"

"Certainly; but remember that no one, rich or poor, ever can look nice in mere smart finery. Besides, the wearing it attracts to her low, bad characters, and repels—that is, keeps off—good and respectable people. And so you think you will be happy in a public-house? I am very sorry to hear it—very."

Mrs. Brown looked nervously at her daughter, and then at Sophia, but did not appear to have

anything to say; whilst Sally looked serious. "Well, Miss," she said, "I did mean to be good, and I did try; but, la! it's so precious hard for poor folk!"

"It is hard for all, Sally, though you may not think so. But, the thing is, do you really wish to be good, and to do something to help your mother?"

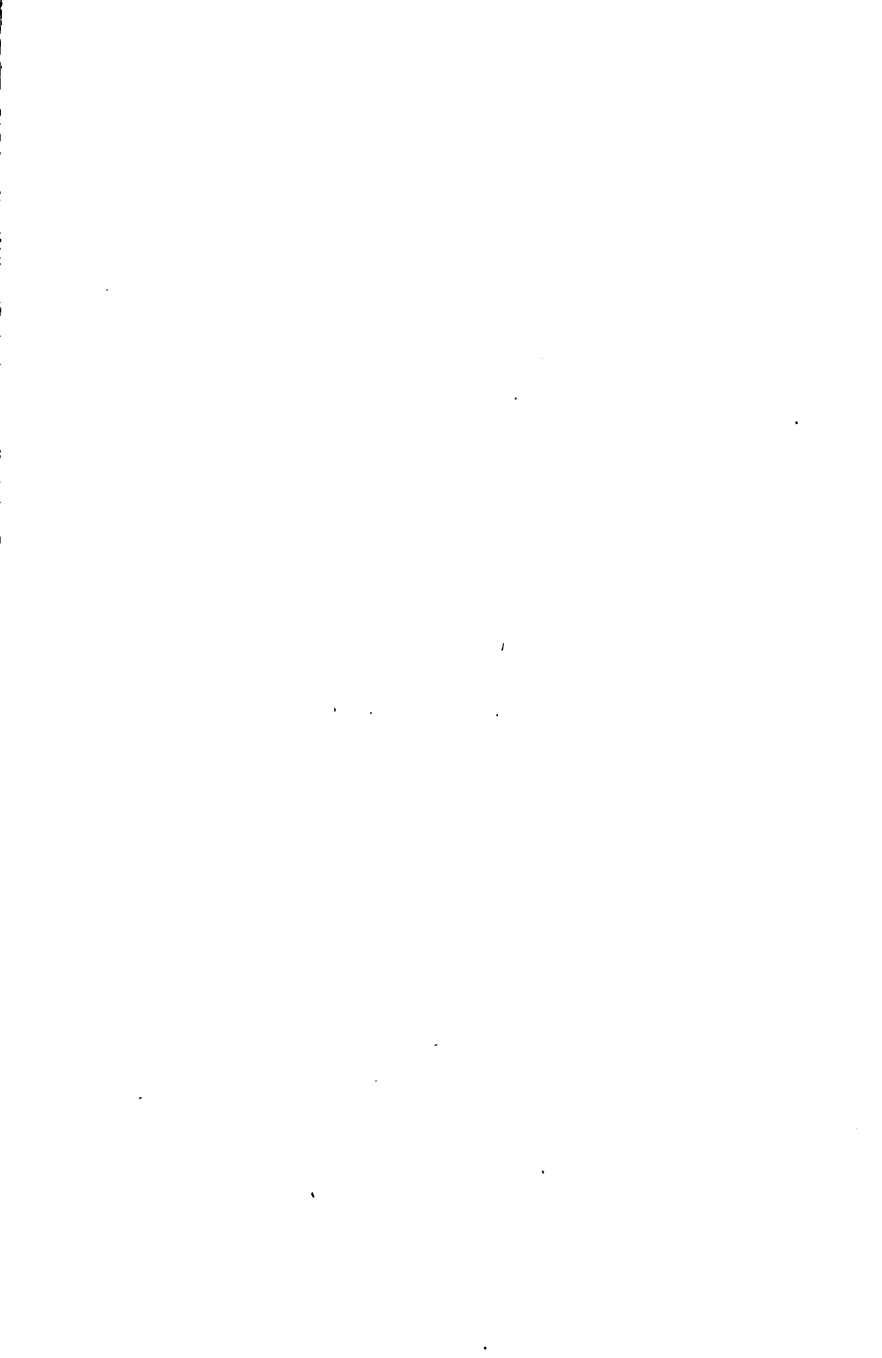
"It don't much matter about me," now remarked Mrs. Brown, with spasmodic energy; "I've had my time, and I don't look forward to nought but trouble to the end of my days. But Sally," turning to her daughter, with a gleam of spirit in her careworn face, "I should like you to be very different from your mother. And I've a notion that those who be afear'd o' work never come to no good, especially if they be fond o' a bit o' smart dress, too—and that kind mostly be. Now be a good girl, and listen to what Miss Stanley tells ye, and it'll be the making of ye, for this life and the next too. So never mind about me; I'll do as I am till I die." And then Mrs. Brown again took to smoothing her apron, as though doing so afforded her consolation in some mysterious way.

Sally looked at her worn, downcast face, and turning to Sophia, abruptly asked, "I suppose you'll be for sending me back to Mrs. Gow's?"

"Ah, I very much doubt if she would take you! A respectable place is not easily obtained after a girl has run away from her last. You see



M. "Sitting but doing, doing, work,"
 and chapel going for a change.



Sally, you make it so difficult for me to do anything for you; though I daresay you did not think of this."

"I didn't think of nothin' but gettin' away, Miss. Yet, I'd like to help mother, for father ain't much comfort to her; and he talks that strange, sometimes, I'm feared to stay indoors."

"And then you are out in the streets, I suppose? That is a bad place for a respectable girl—as you wish to remain, I'm sure."

"Yes; I do that, and will, never fear," replied Sally, drawing herself up.

"Ah, Sally! don't you know that people seldom jump into sin? they slide into it. If you go into service at a public-house, if you frequent the streets, it will be your ruin; and you will sin with your eyes open, for I have warned you faithfully. But I believe better things of you. What work can you do?"

"She can sew pretty middlin', Miss," said Mrs. Brown. "I was a dressmaker and had a good business once, and I have taught her how to use her needle."

"I likes sewin' better than dirty work," added Sally, with emphasis.

"And I suppose you would sit down to sew in a dirty dress and dirty room?"

"No, Miss, I wouldn't; that and the work wouldn't fit. But I *didn't* like it at Mrs. Gow's to be scourin' and scrubbin' from mornin' to night

with scarce a chance to speak to Comfort, the other servant—who weren't no comfort at all—and then going to sleep in the prayer-meetin', and missis nudgin' me to keep me awake. Oh, la! it were deadly dull!"

Sophia looked grieved. She had thought some good impressions had been made upon the girl, but, if so, they had faded; and, just now, she was evidently sickened of what she considered religion. Admonishing her in her present mood would be worse than useless, and yet she would have in some way to be brought under the silent, subduing influence of Christianity. So, after a thoughtful pause, Sophia rose to go, saying, "Well, Sally, notwithstanding my disappointment in you, I will still try to help you, if only you will be in earnest also. You would like to be of use to your mother at once, would you not?"

"I would, Miss; for sometimes she has not a bit nor a sup in the house."

"Then, if I give you some needlework to do for me you will keep it clean?"

But before Sally could reply, her mother, with a frightened look, interposed. "Indeed 'm," she exclaimed, "I wouldn't like for no work to come into the house. I've tried it, and it isn't safe; for when men takes to drink they *will* have it, and so—so—you'd better not send anything here!" And then Mrs. Brown's apron was wrinkled and twisted with renewed energy.

"Ah, I see! Well, Sally, come to my house to-morrow, and I will ascertain what you are capable of doing. I have a plan that may do for the present, about which I must consult my mother. Remember, though, if you expect to have everything as you like in this world, you must starve, for everywhere there will be something to put up with, and laziness is always lean."

"I b'ain't lazy at anything I likes, Miss," the girl replied, somewhat sullenly.

"That we shall see, Sally: be at my house please, at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Good-bye, Mrs. Brown. Your daughter will be a help to you yet, I believe. Come, Lissie, we shall just have time to do our bit of shopping on our way back to my uncle's." And then Sophia departed, seeming to take all the brightness with her from that dingy, cheerless room.

When Sally the next day punctually made her appearance at Mrs. Stanley's, she seemed very pleased to be sent to work in a pretty room; went into ecstasies over the dainty little frocks, pinafores, and babies' socks and boots, destined for the missionary basket, and vowed that she should "love to make sich like;" but upon being tried with plain sewing she did it, though creditably, yet with evident impatience of what she termed "just sewin' on and on." Mrs. Stanley, however, being satisfied with her capabilities, it was decided that she should come daily to assist the other servants in

the morning, and to sew in the after part of the day. The girl seemed very grateful for this arrangement; and Sophia, sanguine as usual, now hoped that she was put in the right way, for the present at least; and, no doubt, God would open up some other and more permanent method of doing her good in the future.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE MISSIONARY MEETING.

PLEASANTLY and usefully the weeks now passed to Melissa. Never before had she been so happy, for never before had her nature come so fully into play. Now the needs of her religious individuality were fully met by the combined practicalness and spirituality of her daily life, in which there was yet no religious drive; the womanly home-instinct was also fully satisfied. Indeed, it seemed with the Stanleys as though their happiness commenced in the home, and overflowed from thence into the hearts and abodes of others. They began, too, not only to love, but to depend upon the bright, deft-fingered little maiden—she looked so young—who, with her simplicity and tact, her amiable desire to please, yet scrupulous conscientiousness, and her deep, but artless religious life, was an example to them all in the upward path—though none would

have been more incredulous of this than Melissa herself. As for Kynford, it seemed as though he could never forget the child-element in her nature, and he delighted to mystify her, and then to amuse himself with the silent perplexity with which she regarded him, and which increased her natural shyness towards him. Consequently, to her he continued to be a nice, but rather queer young gentleman, and she was therefore not sorry that, at present, he was too busy with his legal studies to notice her much.

In the early part of December the Annual Missionary Meeting, referred to by Mrs. Gow, was to be held in the little Methodist chapel at Stixton, and, of course, all the Stanleys, except the invalid mother, were to attend it, and to be entertained at "Cousin Gow's." Equally, of course, the Rev. Wilmot Coulson, who had just come to Linchester as a supply in place of the second minister, lately deceased, was also to be there; and we must acknowledge that Sophia fully shared in the eager curiosity of the young ladies as to what he was like.

The appointed day broke fine, and at three p.m. the Stanleys started in the carriage for Stixton, their party consisting of Mr. Josiah Stanley, Sophia, Kynford, Melissa, and Miss Harriet Hales, a young friend of the family. She was a brisk, black-eyed little body, as good as she was gushing, much shrewder than she seemed, and also a splendid

worker. No one in the congregation eclipsed her as a Sunday-School teacher and mission-collector; she was almost as popular a district visitor as Sophia, and although but twenty, was leader of quite a large class of young women. Naturally, Melissa now knew her quite well, but, though Kynford had been acquainted with her for years, she was as much a mystery to him as he was to Melissa.

After nearly an hour's drive through the usual level country, they came to a long stretch of moor which gradually rose as they neared the little town of Stixton. Passing through the main street with its church, its hotel, and the principal shops of the place, they turned into a side street, where, adjoining the roomy, substantial house in which the Gows lived, stood Zion Chapel. It was a small and almost ostentatiously plain building, yet from the very homeliness of its aspect it seemed just the place for poor, plain folk to worship in.

As the carriage stopped, Mrs. Gow appeared at the door attired in her sober Sunday best, and with a face in which welcome and solicitude were about equally expressed. With a few short, sincere greetings she at once ushered her guests into the front parlour, a primly furnished, well-kept room, in which were now Mr. and Mrs. Paul Gow, and Seth and Sam, the two younger sons of the family—both manly, shrewd looking young fellows. Maria the bride—a canny, charming little woman, with whom her husband was evidently much in love—

very soon betook herself into the kitchen at the back of the house, whither Sophia followed her, at the same time asking if she might not assist in laying out the tables, or cutting up the cake.

"Go away with you," shortly but good temperedly replied Mrs. Gow, "your work is to help eat the cake and not to cut it up! But if you like to go and entertain Mr. Coulson when he comes—and I expect him every minute—I shall be thankful."

"Very well, cousin; anything to be useful—though, I should think Mrs. Paul, being married, should entertain him rather than myself."

But that lady laughed, as she sent a large cake before her on the white deal table expeditiously into slices. "That is the very reason why I should *not* do so," she merrily replied, "for, being married, I can look on now, you know."

"Maria is so happy it makes her saucy, Cousin Sophy," said Paul, coming behind his young wife, and playfully pinching her ear.

"Now, Paul, don't talk nonsense, but make yourself useful!" she responded, with an admonitory shake of the finger. "Have we tea-pots enough?"

"That all depends upon the number of people, my dear. Oh, here is Comfort! What's up now, Comfort?"

A plodding, sturdy looking girl, with broad face and brawny arms, who had entered from the yard, now announced that an omnibus was coming down

the street "chock-full of visitors, and, please 'm, where shall I ask 'em?—the two parlours is full!"

"It is about time the chapel was, too," remarked Sophia; "they had better go there at once. I'll see to it, and leave Maria to amuse Mr. Coulson."

"That's a Parthian shaft, my dear," observed Paul to his wife. "You will make my cousin shy of the new minister."

"Well, don't you think I should like to see her as happy as myself?"

"You can't say 'nay' to that, Paul; and certainly, Sophia is just cut out for a minister's wife," said Mrs. Gow, as she and Comfort bustled off with some trays of eatables. These they carried across a little square yard and from thence into the chapel, returning quickly to order all hands on the spot at once, as the folk were crowding in "like a swarm of bees, and buzzing away much about the same."

When the people were at length fully squeezed into the white-washed, bare little building, with its square pews, and all were pleasantly and profitably occupied in talking and eating, it looked very much as though a family party on a large scale had strayed into the chapel by mistake. And the beaming faces of the busy waiters—foremost amongst whom were Mrs. Gow's three sons—the interchange of greetings between neighbours and acquaintances brought together by the occasion; the sober satisfaction expressed in the countenances of the elder brethren and sisters; the gusto with which the juveniles

demolished the cake and discussed the probable amount of their respective collecting cards; the way in which, towards the end of the tea, the ministers gradually tended towards a large side pew next to the pulpit, thereby becoming a magnet for all eyes and a topic for all tongues as they communed together upon matters of common interest, was altogether a sight very pleasant and cheering to witness. For a while, the chilling barrier of caste was levelled—it was many years ago—and all seemed brethren and sisters in Christ, members of one family.

Presently a sudden hush followed the announcement of the Doxology, after heartily singing which, the people dispersed for half an hour, in order that the chapel might be prepared for the after meeting. At the end of that time, when busy, careful Mrs. Gow re-entered by a side door, she found the building completely crammed, the platform well filled, and her good man, Adam Gow, in the chair.

After a few introductory remarks from him, the secretary read his Report, which, statistical as it necessarily was, nevertheless elicited considerable applause, much increased by the little boys' energetic use of their hands and feet—as he severally stated the amounts collected for the Mission by the juveniles. Mingled consternation and merriment, however, were caused by the announcement, amongst other sums, of “For Mr. Gow's bones—fifteen shillings!” But as

that burly gentleman by no means appeared to have parted with his skeleton, the audience had, for a time, to remain mystified at this singular statement.

The Rev. Wilmot Coulson, of Linchester, was then called upon to address the young people, which he did with such genial earnestness and sympathy as to win both their interest and plaudits. He was succeeded by Paul Gow, who, half-pleased and half-proud, said what was in his heart with straightforward, manly simplicity, and with all the natural eloquence of genuine feeling, thereby rousing his fellow-townsmen to a high pitch of enthusiastic admiration, and Kynford to a state of intense astonishment. He could not understand how a young tradesman, born and bred in a drowsy little town like Stixton, could possibly have so much to say. And granting that he possessed the subject matter, how he could utter it in public was quite beyond Kynford. Glancing, however, at the bonny, little bride's face, now radiant with proud happiness, he concluded that *there* was the source of Paul's inspiration, and wondered if his own marriage with Sophia—should he ever be so fortunate—would produce a similar effect upon himself. And then Kynford sighed after the manner of lovers in general.

At last the speech of the evening came off in an address from a real, live Missionary, caught for the purpose. It was illustrated by specimens of native dress, grotesque little idols, and formidable weapons

of very hard wood, which the small boys eyed with shrinking interest. The speaker was an old man with a resolute mouth, twinkling grey eyes, and a benevolent expression, and he possessed that indispensable qualification for an orator—the ability to carry his audience with him. First arousing their interest by witty compliment, and amusing anecdote, he retained it by his sympathetic power, and evoked smiles, tears, or enthusiasm at will. A veteran in the mission field, he was eagerly followed by the people in the recital of his adventures, as he now preached to the fierce Fijian—uncertain as to whether he next should have a meal or make one—now argued with the astute and haughty Brahmin, or, yet again, strove to convince the pig-tailed Chinaman; learning everywhere himself both how to abound and how to want; determined in all things to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified, and to preach Him while he had life and strength. He wound up with an impassioned appeal for aid in so grand a cause, and many an earnest upturned face—albeit belonging to some overgrown country bumpkin—kindled with a responsive and enthusiastic interest that might in the future make other missionary recruits, to fill up the ranks as the veterans fell in the service of the Great Commander.

There was, of course, a rattling collection, after which the chairman, his broad, benevolent face beaming with satisfaction, rose, thanked the Depu-

tation from the Parent Society for the great treat which he had afforded them; spoke of his own personal interest in missions; of his fealty to Methodism, which had made him what he was, and finally he begged leave to explain a statement which had caused some mirth in the earlier part of the evening. He referred to the announcement by the Secretary, amongst other sums contributed to the Mission Funds, of "*Fifteen shillings for Mr. Gow's bones!*" He need not assure them that, as yet, they were above ground, and that he was both alive and well. But the sum mentioned had been obtained by saving and selling the bones left from the meat consumed by his household, and also by disposing of all the rags, thus illustrating the proverb that "Where there's a will there's a way," and that "Many a little makes a mickle." In this manner the poorest could contribute their mite to the cause which had been so ably and eloquently advocated by their friend the Deputation, and he had much pleasure in proposing that the meeting should accord to him a hearty vote of thanks. This was carried by acclamation, and then a hymn was sung, the Benediction pronounced, and the people separated.

The Stanleys and their friends partook of refreshment before starting for home, and it was quite a merry party that gathered round the supper table in Mrs. Gow's formally furnished parlour. Sophia was brighter than usual with excitement and pleasure, and gentle, grave Mr. Coulson seemed to be quite

fascinated by her expressive face and animated conversation. Perhaps she may have felt this, for, free enough to everyone else, she addressed him but seldom, and then with a pretty mixture of shyness and interest. Or was she conscious that the observant gaze of Mrs. Paul Gow was frequently upon her, and did she remember that lady's recent jest?

As for dark-eyed Harriet Hales, she was as lively and natural as usual. First she entered into a spirited conversation with Clement Jones, a clerk of Mr. Josiah Stanley's, upon the power which imagination gives us to realize the individuality and suffering of others. But, logical and dogmatic, he soon talked down even the voluble Harriet, inspired, perhaps, by Melissa's very evident appreciation of his ability. Nothing daunted by her defeat, Harriet chatted all round to everybody, complimented the grey-haired old missionary as though he had been a youngster, and, finally, made Paul Gow blush like a girl by gravely assuring him that he ought not to hide his talents in a little place like Stixton, but allow them to blaze forth upon an astonished world, for that he really was a "born orator!" This remark naturally drew the attention of the company rather uncomfortably towards Paul, whereupon Maria, who was on the opposite side of the room, looked askance at Harriet with a most suspicious eye, doubtful if she were not an audacious young lady daring to poke fun at him. Perceiving,

however, that, on the contrary, she was regarding him with big eyes of honest admiration, Maria's face brightened, and from that moment Harriet became a prime favourite with her.

The carriage was now announced, and the Stanleys prepared to leave. Much to Kynford's disgust, Mr. Josiah Stanley insisted that the Rev. W. Coulson should accompany them instead of returning to Linchester by the omnibus in which he had come from thence. But the lover's annoyance became downright bad temper when the young minister innocently seated himself by Sophia's side, and fell into an easy and delightful conversation with her, as naturally as though he had known her for years.

So it happened upon their arrival at home, when Mrs. Stanley sympathetically inquired of Kynford how he had enjoyed himself, he rather gruffly replied, "That it was all tolerable enough except the ride home, which was sleepy sort of work." And then, yawning ostentatiously, he marched off to bed, unable quite to conceal the crossness of his mood, which he felt a good quarrel with Mr. Coulson, upon any pretext or none at all, would have most effectually cured.





CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE WINDOW.

SIX months had passed since the eventful meeting at which Sophia had made the acquaintance of her destined partner. For from the first, Mr. Coulson and herself had been mutually attracted, as those always must be whose tastes and dispositions agree in essentials, and only differ to supply or counterbalance what is lacking or too dominant in each. Theirs, too, was a deliciously natural courtship; one not forced on in unmaidenly haste to proclaim an engagement, but lingered over in tacit trust, and with a slow growth of affection as silent and beautiful as the budding of flower and foliage in spring. Sophia was very undemonstrative, but there was often now a downcast, blushing grace in her manner, a brooding joy in the frequent silence of her mood, both eloquent of the welcome which the "prince" for whom all women wait had met with in her heart.

As for Mrs. Stanley, she was well pleased with her daughter's choice. Of fortune she had sufficient; and Wilmot Coulson, beside the essential fact of his being a child-hearted Christian, and a devoted minister of the Gospel, was also of good family.

But to our little Melissa the winter had not been altogether a happy time; a cloud was gathering on the horizon of her life. As Kynford had said, she had not yet sacrificed all for duty. Could the gentle maiden, so easily persuaded where self was concerned, so inflexible where her allegiance to God was threatened, could she cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye? We shall see.

Kynford was still studying for his profession, learning its routine in the office, working hard, and growing thin and haggard. His foster-mother expostulated with him for fagging so—though she loved him dearly for doing it—and Mr. Josiah Stanley dubbed him a thorough-paced, persevering young fellow, who would do credit to the family and to the profession.

He, of course, had been the first to perceive the attachment between Wilmot and Sophia, and an incident now occurred which finally proved to him that his own secretly cherished love was entirely hopeless, and which rendered it more difficult than ever for him to wear the smiling mask which he had assumed for his dear one's sake.

One evening in June, Sophia, upon her return from a class-meeting, went into the library and sat down to

rest in a lounging chair by the open French window, looking out upon the lawn, at one side of which was the carriage drive, its curve partly hidden by a shrubbery. And as she sat in the glow of the setting sun that now streamed its radiance into the room, Kynford, who stood within the shadow of the heavy curtain, thought that she needed but a halo to complete her resemblance to a pictured saint. She wore a flowing white muslin; the blue ribbon which confined her auburn tresses, and a few forget-me-nots fastened into her brooch, were the only touches of colour in her attire. And with her head slightly thrown back, her fair, firm little hands folded in her lap, her lustrous brown eyes gazing outward and upward so calmly, so brightly, she indeed looked lovely with a spiritual beauty, upon which Kynford gazed with wondering reverence. Presently he drew nearer, and laid his hand upon her shoulder with a careless, brotherly touch, but with a look, unseen by her, that told how he longed to caress her. For never yet had he ventured to appear to her as the lover, and now—it was too late.

She turned quickly, exclaiming, "Why, brother, I had no idea that you were here!"

"You seemed far enough away, Sophy; whither had you gone?"

"Look," she replied, pointing to the amber-tinted and crimson-flushed sky, "how can one help thinking of the streets of gold, and the sea of fire? Gazing yonder, one's spirit seems to strain beyond the

sense of sight, and to yearn for the vision of which that is but a type. And Kynford, as soon as I quit this prison-house of clay, that heaven will be mine, and with it sight and scope, strength and rapture."

"Why, Sophy, are you tired of earth already—and *just now*? That cannot be!"

"Nay; it is not that I love earth less but heaven more, since the love here does but interpret the love there." And then Sophia blushed charmingly in the slight pause that followed her words—but slight, though, for, with a sudden change of manner, she soon added—"We had such a happy meeting to-night, Kynford; Lissie spoke so simply and so sweetly, and the others gave such cheering testimony—grace upon God's part, and gratitude upon theirs. I wish that you would come to our class sometimes—do, now, just to please me."

"*I*? Impossible! though you have put in a strong plea. But can't any one be good without going there? God will hear one outside of a church or class-room, surely."

"Now, Kynford, you know it; but—"

"*Do* I know it?" he retorted bitterly. "I'm not so sure of it; at any rate, my prayers are heard only to be refused. There, don't look shocked, Sophy, dear; I know I'm half a heathen—and now I come to think of it, I have a great mind to become a Papist, and believe in the intercession of saints. Do *you* ever pray for me?"

"I never forget to do so; always shall I pray for my dear brother."

An expression of mingled torture and triumph passed over the young man's face as Sophia spoke. Yes, she loved him, she prayed for him—but as for a brother. Well, if in the shadow himself he would not fleck her sunshine; and so it was with a cheerful gravity that he replied, "Thanks, Sophy; I shall often like to think of that."

"Ah, but brother, God will answer your prayers some day—never doubt it; though, perhaps, not in the way you wish. And now, I want to ask you about Clement Jones."

"You mean your uncle's clerk, of course?"

"Yes; do you know he walked home to-night with Lissie from class?—he meets in ours."

"Whew! That's it, is it?"

"That is just it, and I want to know your opinion of him. You see him every day."

"I see the clerk every day; of the man I know but little."

"Oh! I am sure that he is good, but whether suited to my little Lissie, I cannot tell."

"Perhaps she can."

"Scarcely, if love be blind—and she does love him, I'm sure. He, too, appears to be in downright earnest with her."

"He is sure to be so; he is downright in everything. A dogged sort of fellow; grimly logical, horribly in earnest, and exasperatingly methodical.



M "And as she sat in the
glow of the evening sun"

I wonder how he goes on with Miss Deane; it must be a terribly funereal courtship, I should think: no wonder the poor girl is low spirited. She tells you all her secrets I suppose—girls never can keep them—so pray extend the confidence to me. How does he manage, Sophy? What does he say to her? Do tell me; I *should* like to hear something of Clem's courtship!"

"Wicked boy! you needn't laugh at him. You will be in the same miserable plight some day, and then you too will be 'horribly in earnest.' But do you know nothing of Mr. Jones himself?"

"Little besides what I have told you. He is, I believe, rather close-fisted, and touchily proud, I know. He has risen from the lower class, too, and there is a story in the office that his mother used to go out charing; and that when Clem was taunted with this he fiercely retorted that if he lived, she should ride in her carriage yet."

"That is a good sort of pride; I like him for it."

"And so does Miss Deane, I suppose. Yet, such an expression of anger showed a want of pride, in my opinion. He should have met such a remark with silent scorn. But how long has this courtship been going on?"

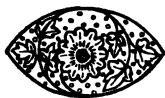
Kynford, however, received no immediate reply, for he and Sophia were at the same moment aware of the sound of a quick, manly step upon the gravel drive, and his face clouded as hers brightened. She

rose eagerly, and bent forward to judge how near the visitor might be. It was whilst she was in this listening attitude that the Rev. Wilmot Coulson came suddenly into sight from beyond the shrubbery. Sophia's face at once became radiant, and he was close enough to perceive it kindle into joy, to catch the sparkle of her eyes, as they flashed a momentary rapture, and to be charmed with her vivid blush, as, fearing that she had betrayed too much emotion, she hastily resumed her seat, and turned from the window to answer Kynford's neglected question. But her foster-brother had vanished, and Wilmot, who had made few steps across the lawn, was now at her side, looking down into her half-averted face, imprisoning her hand, and asking the privilege to call it his own. Then as Sophia acknowledged the affection she could not deny, and pledged him her troth, she realised what before she had only believed, that Life at its best is Love and that Love is Life.

And what of Kynford? Whilst the lovers were oblivious of all but their own happiness, he watched the sunset fade from his chamber window, though he did not see the stars brighten into view; for as the darkness gathered, he sat with bowed head, enduring the inevitable anguish of a first and hopeless love. True, he had known before that Sophia cared for Wilmot, but now he had witnessed how *much* !

Yet when the family met at supper time, pleased and excited, he too congratulated the betrothed, and in a frank, brotherly way that left nothing to be

desired, and allowed nothing to be suspected. That seemed so little to do when he would readily have died for Sophia. How happy she looked! Well this was now his only comfort, and so, protected by the unselfishness of his love from jealousy—that reptile of the heart—when all parted for the night, Kynford again momentarily forgot the bitterness of his own grief, and smiled once more upon the proud lover and blushing girl with a—“Good night, Sophy; and may God bless you and yours!”





CHAPTER XV.

LOVE AND DUTY.

MELISSA scarcely knew whether to be pleased or vexed at Sophia's engagement. For in August Mr. Coulson would have completed his stipulated year's ministry at Linchester, and would then be taking charge of a more important circuit in a large manufacturing town, to which he had been already invited. Sophia had consented to accompany him as a bride to his new home, and it was to the speedy separation involved by this arrangement that Melissa could not be reconciled. Then, too, besides her sorrow at losing her friend; she had also her own private sources of disquietude.

It was about this time that Kynford discovered that the little maiden began to watch at the window for the postman, or to start nervously at the sound of his imperative rat-tat. And when the letters were brought in and there happened to be none for her, he would give her an arch look

that made our shy Melissa droop her curls to hide her hot cheeks, and earnestly wish that Mr Kynford were desperately in love himself, and then, perhaps, he would not be so very provoking.

At length *the* letter came, and not in a gentleman's handwriting. This Kynford perceived as he handed it to Melissa, and he was consequently mystified at the earnestness with which she seized it, and, with a hurried apology, tore it open and just glanced through its contents. This done, she abstractedly crumpled it into her pocket—"It is not very precious" thought Kynford—and then, with a face as pale as it had before been flushed, observed in a low voice, "A letter from my *mother*, Miss Stanley."

Kynford noticed the slightly emphasised word intended, he knew, for his especial benefit—but said nothing.

Sophia looked interested. "There is no bad news from home, I hope, dear?" she inquired.

"Oh, no; very good news. Ralph has been appointed to a new curacy, and as the living is in the hands of his great friend and patron, and the vicar is old and infirm, my mother thinks that Ralph stands a good chance of obtaining it some day."

"Capital! How pleased you must all be—your mother especially."

"Yes; she is very fond of Ralph," replied Melissa, plodding through her breakfast with a grave face. "And Mary's business, too, must be increasing for she talks of seeking another in-door apprentice."

"Why, that is more good news!" said Sophia, looking puzzled at Melissa's indifferent, pre-occupied manner. Then a bright thought struck her. "Oh! my dear," she added excitedly, "do you think your sister would try our Sally as an apprentice? I am almost in despair about her, for she gives her wages to her mother, and, of course, Mr. Brown pockets them, so that the poor girl has no encouragement to work. Then, too, she gets out of an evening with a set of flashy girls, and so can settle to nothing in the morning. And she makes cook so cross that I am almost afraid to put my head into the kitchen at all. Really, I have a great mind to take Sally with me to my future home."

"Do nothing of the sort, Sophy," peremptorily observed Kynford. "The girl will be a chronic plague to you; you had better wash your hands of her at once."

"There is sense in what Kynford says," assented Mrs. Stanley, "you must not take Sally with you, my dear."

"Then, mother, what can I do? I must not trouble my friends with her, and I *will* not give her up."

"Well, let Miss Deane's sister try her," said Kynford, as he passed his cup for more coffee, "and say that *I* can recommend her taste in making up finery. Don't laugh, Sophy; I'm sure that mother seems as young again in her caps since Sally made them, and Miss Deane looked so charmingly coquettish in her new hat—it's a fact, so she needn't shake her head at me—

that I felt assured Sally had trimmed it also. In fact, the girl is a born milliner, as Miss Hales would say, and a milliner let her be. That's my opinion."

"Yes, but, Kynford, she ought to learn house-work thoroughly. Besides, I wish to make her womanly and steady, and there are, sometimes, such flighty girls in a milliner's room."

"What sort of a girl is your sister, Miss Deane? Do you recognise the description?" slyly inquired Kynford.

"Now, you are downright naughty!" cried Sophia, reddening as she perceived her inadvertent blunder.

"Lissie quite knows what I mean; do you not, dear?"

"I know that Mr. Kynford is a merciless teaze," replied the one appealed to, with a half-defiant, half-saucy smile and toss of the head, that made her look coquettish without the hat.

"There!" laughed Sophia, "and now I hope you are settled, sir."

Kynford looked dubiously at the egg he had just broken, and then,—“I wish the white of this were,” he ruefully replied, as he vainly attempted to get some of the slippery, glutinous mass into his spoon. “Sally boiled this, I know, she always does send an egg up either in this state, or as hard as a fossil.”

“Well, and what does Miss Deane think should be done unto this unfortunate Sally?” inquired Mrs. Stanley. “She has not yet given us *her* opinion.”

“I think, ma'am, that if Miss Stanley can trust

Mary, she will be quite equal to managing Sally. I can answer for it that my mother will control her. And it seems to me that she must be made to feel that she *dare* not be so wild, and then that will help her to be steadier. She just wants mastering."

"Like most of her sex. Now, I believe I like Sally as much for that as for her good looks. Mother, I think I had better take her in hand myself. I like that sort of girl—mettlesome and mischievous; one who needs breaking in. I assure you I'm in earnest, Miss Deane; very much so!"

For Melissa had looked at the speaker, first in so incredulous, and then in so indignant a way, that even sedate Mrs. Stanley laughed, whilst Kynford gravely continued: "When I am married, Miss Deane, I intend, the very first week of the honeymoon, to make my wife bring me my breakfast every morning before she has her own, and woe be unto her if she bring me such an impracticable egg as this"—pushing it from him in despair. "She shall address me as 'sir,' and order herself lowly and reverently towards me in a general way; read me to sleep when I am tired, sing to me when I'm sad, and when sick nurse me assiduously, nor ever venture to get even the traditional 'forty winks' without my gracious permission. Of course she must think me perfection, anticipate my slightest wish, adore me whilst I live, and die of a broken heart, should she be so unfortunate as to survive me."

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"Nay, would not a *suttée* suit you better?" disdainfully exclaimed Melissa, drawing herself up with as much dignity as her little figure could possibly express.

Kynford put down the cup when half-way to his lips, and looked at her with eyes brimming with silent laughter; whereupon Melissa, suddenly enlightened, coloured deeply.

"Take no notice of his nonsense, dear," said Sophia, soothingly; "he is never happy unless he is teasing some one. As for Sally, I think the plan I first suggested an excellent one, and as all seem to approve of it, I should be glad if, when writing to your sister, you would kindly mention it to her, and ask if she could venture to try Sally."

"I will write as soon as possible, Miss Stanley; I have my mother's letter to answer, and—and—in fact, I may not write for a few days. Will that be soon enough?"

"Certainly, dear; do it quite at your own convenience. And now, I want you to go to my studio and see my last painting; I shall like your opinion of it presently; then, too," she added, in an undertone as she followed Melissa to the door, "you can read your letter all to yourself."

"Something's up," averred Kynford, as he rose and rang the bell for the removal of the breakfast things. "The question was not popped in that letter of Miss Deane's, for certain; and that it contains bad news is equally sure."

"My dear boy, I'm afraid you overstep the limits of courtesy sometimes in teasing Lissie so," said Mrs. Stanley, as she settled in an easy chair by the open window, where she might catch the breeze. "Though I am glad to see you in such good spirits; indeed, Sophy's engagement has made us all happy, I believe."

To this last observation Kynford made no reply, but stroked the dog lying at his feet, and then made him beg for a chicken-bone. This performance concluded, he said carelessly: "I hope I was not impolite to Miss Deane just now, but I am sure I was not unkind. You see, a little gentle poking up brought back the colour to her cheek, and, I trust, brought her combative faculties, too, sufficiently into play to assist her to withstand whatever her trouble may be. And, really, I hope that Jones may win her, as she will then have some one to stand up *for* her; she will never be able to stand up for herself. Well, I'm off to work. Good morning, mother. Sophy is gone, I see."

In the meantime Melissa, instead of examining the just completed painting, went into a corner of the studio, sat down on the floor, and read her letter through from beginning to end. Then, with a deep sigh, she refolded it, replaced it in her pocket, and dolefully pondered its contents. "Must I give up Clement?" she mentally soliloquized; "and only because he is poor himself, and has still poorer relations in Castleton? They say that he is not good enough for

me—that I must not throw myself away ; and Ralph guarantees that I shall never want a home as long as he lives. What of that ? what is money in comparison with love ? I am not afraid of poverty ; with health, hope, and thrift, no one need be scared by it. Indeed, I will *not* give up Clement ! I believe he loves me, and, though he has not yet told me so, I cannot but think he would have done so last night when returning from chapel, if Sister Simms—I never disliked her before—had not joined us just as we were turning down a nice, quiet street. Then he is so wise, and firm, and good, and—oh, I *do* love him so very much !”

Having arrived at this conclusion, Melissa’s tears, long gathering, freely overflowed, and it was with difficulty that she restrained the deep, convulsive sobs. Somewhat calmed by the effort, her mind reverted to her parent’s opposition to her intimacy, at present, with the lawyer’s clerk, and ultimately with his family—for this it was, she fancied, more than to the man himself. “ Yet they tell me that I must trust to their judgment in the matter ” was her silent, but somewhat indignant comment—“ that they have only my happiness at heart, and decide for my good. Why must their affection always thwart my wishes, I wonder : is it really affection ? Mother, at least, was cold enough the other day ; yet now she does write very kindly—says that she only wishes to save me from much suffering in the future, though to do so she is compelled to thrust it upon me in the

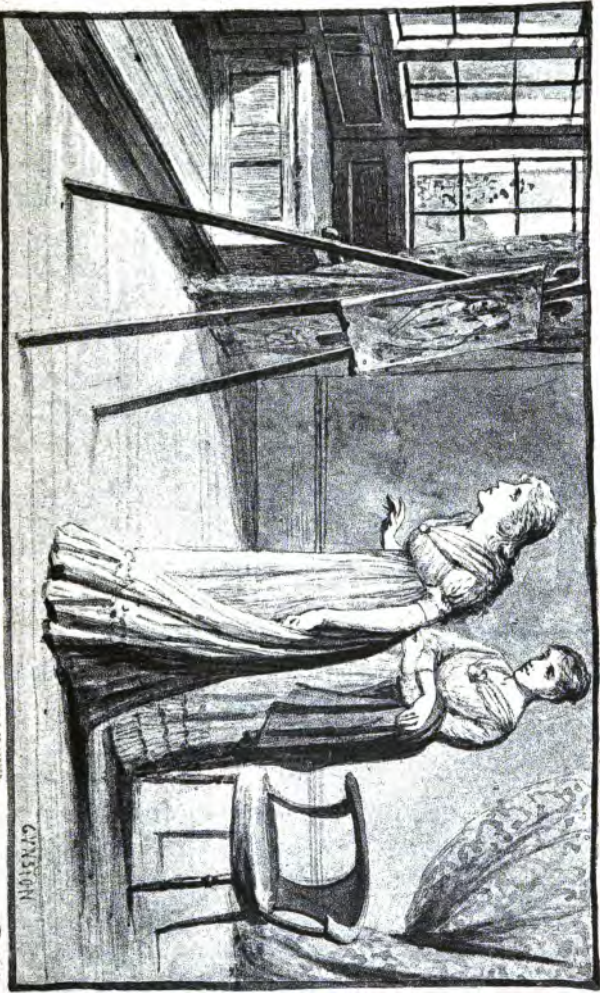
present ; and that she can rely upon my obedience, as she believes, however mistaken, I have always *intended* to be a dutiful daughter. She knows that at last, then ! But, suppose I were to be determined to take Clement, would they think at home that my persistence was owing to what they call my ‘ Methodistical notions ? ’ Yes, surely ; for they attribute everything wrong in me, or what they consider to be so, to the influence of my religion. And, certainly, if I have my own way in this matter it will be in direct opposition to my parent’s wishes, and therefore disobedience. Thus I shall inevitably dishonour God.” And Melissa’s gravity deepened and still deepened, until it presently gave way to another burst of tears.

“ Oh, I wish I knew what it is *right* to do ? ” she murmured, “ for, if left to myself, I shall be sure to choose my own way. Perhaps father and mother are right : and besides, I am such a poor silly little thing that, after all, Clem may not love me as much as I fancy—certainly, not half as much as I do him ! Indeed, indeed how can he ? But, hist ! there is Sophia coming ; now she will see that I have been crying. And I’ve been wasting a good hour here ; what will Mrs. Stanley think of me ? ”

“ May I come in ? ” inquired a cheerful voice, immediately followed by the appearance of an equally cheerful face at the door.

Melissa advanced, looking rather disconcerted as Sophia entered ; but when she went up to her, and

"Oh, little dancing!"
 "Medusa could say no more"



"THE ARTIST" BY J. H. B. & CO. LONDON.

G. W. B.

without any comment upon her tearful, troubled face, first kissed her, and then gently drew her towards the still covered easel, her silent sympathy proved strange comfort to our loving, clinging, little heroine.

"I have been so busy the last day or two putting the finishing touches to this," said the artist, as she rather proudly disclosed her painting, "and I hope that Lissie will like what is to be my parting gift to her."

"Oh, Miss Stanley!" Melissa could say no more for it was an oil painting of Sophia and herself upon which she gazed, and—it was her own!

"Why, the real Lissie is as speechless as her semblance!" exclaimed Sophia, more gratified by her friend's sudden inability to speak than by the most profuse thanks. "Are the portraits good, do you think?"

"They are to the life. But you cannot mean this to be really my own?"

"Yes, when it is framed. But I was so vain of my achievement that I could not wait until then to show it to you."

"Oh, how kind you are, and so clever!" And Melissa looked at the pleased and smiling Sophia with quite an awe of admiration. "Your portrait too," she continued, "is especially good—it has just your bright smile."

"I think yours is equally well done, though only from memory, but it is not taken as you looked when

Kynford teased you just now. I did not think that you could have shown such spirit!"

Melissa looked troubled. "I hope I did not say anything wrong, Miss Stanley. I am too quick tempered, I know."

"Tush, child; your temper is as sound and sweet as a nut. And now, this picture, when framed, with your permission, shall hang in the drawing-room until such time—long hence, I hope—as you are obliged to leave us. For dear mother will look to you as to a second daughter when I'm gone. So, you see, we cannot do without you."

"You are all so kind," responded Melissa tremulously, that—that—"her lips quivered, her eyes filled; but she resolutely mastered her emotions, and continued with grave earnestness, "Miss Stanley, I cannot love you all more than I do, but I can try to show it more, and I will."

"Then be happy, Lissie; there is always sunshine in the upward path, you know. And now, come along! Mother has sundry matters about which to consult her little housekeeper."

Guided by the instinct of self-respect, Melissa did not confide what her trouble was to the Stanleys, but she felt much strengthened by their sympathy, expressed as it was by increased kindness in word and deed. And, after much conflict and prayer, she decided that, come what might, she would never oppose her parents where only her own inclination was concerned, and not a distinct, imperative, and

pre-eminent duty. Besides, ever doubting her own worthiness, the more she compared herself with her lover—who, in her estimation, was a *multum in parvo* of all Christian virtues and graces—the more she felt it probable that the affection was greater on her side than on his. As for her own disappointment—well, it did not matter much about her as long as he was happy. So, with many a tear, she wrote to her mother, consenting to obey her wish and to renounce Clement in reliance upon their superior wisdom, trusting that her submission might, at least, prove her love for her parents and her desire to do their will, and that of God.

A still harder task followed. Her lover had to be avoided for a time, and, with one so pertinacious as he was, this was no easy matter to accomplish. Indeed, he very soon made an opportunity to see her alone for a few moments, and with a meaning look gently offered her a flower. Poor Melissa! Painfully blushing, and evidently trembling—for with the fascination of a firm will he held her gaze, she resolutely put it from her, turned, and walked quickly away. How she had summoned strength to refuse the coveted love just as she was convinced of its reality she knew not; though it would have saved her many a needless tear had she but been aware that pride was stronger in Clement's heart than even his affection for her, which, in fact, soon gave place to a feeling of sullen resentment.

A few days after this occurrence, Kynford told Sophia

that her uncle was terribly put about, for that Jones had not only given him notice, but had declined too an immediate offer of an increased salary—much to his employer's astonishment! "However," continued Kynford, "he will soon get another situation, for he's as shrewd as he is pushing and plodding. But depend upon it, Miss Deane and he have had a terrible quarrel; and it must be his fault—he has such an overbearing will. And perhaps it's all for the best; for, she is so easy and submissive, she would, in time, convert any man into a tyrannical Turk."

"That is your idea of her, Kynford. But let me tell you, notwithstanding her gentleness and deference, she is far more unyielding where certain she is in the right, than many who are positive and wilful."

"Well, Sophy, Jones is positive enough, for he sticks to it that he shall leave Linchester, and make his way elsewhere. Both of which I have no doubt he will do."

"I am glad to hear it," observed Mrs. Stanley, rousing from what had appeared to be a nap; "the poor child will forget him the sooner. And, certainly, he is not good enough for her; he is far too hard, despotic, and self-important. Fortunately, it is more than likely that Lissie did but love her ideal in him; I doubt if he had won her whole nature."

"So much the better for her," emphatically affirmed Kynford. "A slight wound will sooner heal."

"Time alone will show if it be a slight one. Pray what do you know about these matters?" hastily cried Sophia. And then, with a quick change of manner, she murmured—"My poor little Lissie!"

Knyford turned, looked at the speaker with a sudden, wistful earnestness, and sauntered out of the room.





CHAPTER XVI.

NOT TO BE BORNE.

IN due time Melissa received two letters from home, one from her mother, and one from her sister Mary. Both cheered her, and she needed comfort, for her heart was sore and sorrowful enough. Nevertheless, she was spared the wild warfare that raged in Kynford's bosom, for she had looked to God for guidance, and now leant upon Him for support, and He therefore kept her in peace. And though she often wept of a night as she pictured 'poor Clement's' unhappiness, and hoped that he did not think *very* badly of her, yet Mrs. Deane's few, but emphatic words of approval, and the more affectionate tone of her letter, gave Melissa heartfelt and lasting pleasure, and afforded her reasonable grounds for the hope that, in time, her mother would be fully reconciled to her.

Mary referred but briefly to her sister's love-affair, merely remarking that she had now been as strong to yield, as before she had been to withstand. She then passed on to the consideration of Miss Stanley's

proposal about Sally, and finally expressed willingness to give her a trial. Also, contrary to her usual custom with apprentices, she promised her a slight remuneration from the first, as she imagined that the poor girl, as yet, had been scarcely afforded the chance of looking at her earnings—much less of saving them. Mrs. Deane, too, continued Mary, was interested in her, and would allow her to be treated as one of the family, and to assist occasionally in the shop as a change from needlework. But Sally was fully to understand that her coming was quite an experiment, the success of which depended entirely upon herself.

Mrs. Stanley and Sophia were delighted at Sally's new prospects, and Kynford again expressed approval of the plan, and hopefulness in its success, as they discussed Mary's letter after the morning meal. "For now," said he, "the girl will have motherly care, freedom, guarded by strictness, work that she likes, and, to crown all, she will have cut that precious father of hers. And if I were Mrs. Brown I would follow Sally's example."

"Poor Mrs. Brown!" exclaimed Sophia; "she still tries to take care of her husband, for she says that he was kind once, and 'mighty clever.' And now I must see Sally and persuade her to accept this plan."

"Don't coax her, Sophy; that will only make her conceited and try to ferret out objection. Just startle her with a brilliant prospect; nice rooms to make the finery in, Miss Deane's belief in her clever-

ness, plenty of faces to be seen, and always some one to talk to. First make her mouth water, and when she jumps at the cherry, just bob it in."

"Come with me then, Mr. Lawyer, and state the case yourself," merrily exclaimed Sophia, at the same time seizing Kynford by the hand, as if to lead him away.

"No, indeed, women can always best plead their own cause," he replied, quickly passing his arm around her waist. "There, now you are my prisoner! And why must you leave us, Sophy? Suppose I will not let you go?"

"Suppose you must?" she retorted, looking laughingly into the dark, earnest face, bent over her—though it was still a smiling one. "For Wilmot will want me some time, and Sally does now; so pray release me."

"Go—unransomed, then! I am more generous than some one else would be." A speech which sent Sophia away blushing very prettily.

"You spoil her, Kynford," observed Mrs. Stanley, smiling and looking up from her household accounts, which naturally had rather perplexed her during the last few minutes. "She will want so much petting, I fear."

"I disown the charge, mother; say rather, that she has spoiled me. And, indeed, I am somewhat good-for-nothing this morning; my brain feels as musty as a file of old documents. Perhaps the breeze may blow the cobwebs away, so I will indulge myself in a walk to

Stixton Moor. Tell Sophy that if I meet with Teresa the gipsy again, I will bring her home with me."

"And we will drive out and meet you, dear; you look quite pale. Really, you must not overwork yourself so to make up for what you call 'lost time,' as that will do good to no one, and much harm to yourself."

"All right, mother; I'll take care of Number One, never fear. By-the-by, don't take up Wilmot on the way if you happen to meet him; there won't be room for both of us in the carriage, I warn you. He will have enough of Sophy soon, and a great deal too soon."

"Envious fellow! Don't growl at his happiness; but, rather, follow his example."

"Oh, you can spare me, then?" responded Kynford, turning abruptly in the door-way.

"No, no, my boy—not yet," was the hurried—almost alarmed reply.

"I knew it," he rejoined. "You see, the mater can't do without me, Miss Deane, so it is lucky I am a fixture." And then they heard his quick, firm step in the hall; and Melissa observed a thoughtful, almost a stern face, as he passed the window.

Upon being told of the new life proposed for her, Sally was delighted; was sure she should like it; thanked Sophia and Melissa gratefully; entered eagerly into the arrangements for her departure, and when Melissa saw her off at the coach, exclaimed with much earnestness, as she shook hands—"Good bye, Miss Deane, and please tell Miss Stanley that I *will* be good."

Mr. Brown, of course, was not consulted ; and the mother was only too thankful that her child should have a better chance in life than she could possibly give her within the range of the home influence.

Time now passed swiftly in the preparations for Sophia's wedding and departure, until the day before the all-important one had arrived, when the bride-elect felt that she might conscientiously have her last few hours at home all to herself. It was a lovely afternoon in August, and she, Melissa, and Kynford were together in the summer parlour—a cheerful room with windows that opened upon a verandah, now embowered in roses and jasmine, and disclosing through its leafy arches, azure sky, verdant meadows, and the distant river flashing in the brilliant sunshine.

“How happy everything looks,” said Sophia, as she stood at the open window. “I cannot realize that I am going so soon—so *very* soon now—to leave the dear old place.” Then, for about the tenth time that day, she asked, “You will both be sure to make mother happy when I am gone—now won't you?”

Yes,” replied Melissa, who sat busily occupied with her needle at the other window, “yes ; for I love her as my own.”

“I cannot say how much that is,” exclaimed Kynford, with an accent of inexpressible bitterness, “but—I love her more than myself ; will that do, Sophy?”

She looked at the gloomy face opposite to her with a startled inquisitive gaze. But it was baffled by the

calm eyes that met hers, and so, being puzzled, she was naturally vexed, and exclaimed, with a touch of petulance, "Really, Kynford, I can't see why you should look so dismal! One would think you were anticipating a funeral to-morrow, instead of a wedding?"

"How can one help being sad, knowing that you will take all the sunshine with you?" was the despondent reply.

Melissa looked grieved and bent lower over her work. She felt condemned for having, as she imagined, brought her clouds into other people's skies; and penitently determined to seem ever so bright, even saucily vivacious, after Miss Stanley's departure.

"But, brother," resumed Sophia, "you must not, indeed, take my going to heart like this. You know I rely upon you not only to look after mother, but to tease her when she needs a little rousing—as you do now. Lissie, he seems quite lost!"

"Whose step is that on the path?" hastily inquired Kynford. "Do you know it, Sophy?"

She listened, blushed, and smiled; for the next moment Wilmot Coulson stood in the verandah, and in another, was at her side.

"Covetous one!" cried his betrothed, as she gave him a hand that was first kissed, and then retained. "Could you not allow me my last day to myself? Nay, don't go, Kynford—please, don't; I shall be far enough away from you to-morrow, you know."

Kynford groaned in his heart, but remained at the desire of his innocent tormentor, being most unwilling to excite suspicion, especially on Wilmot's part. But he felt his misery almost unbearable, and so occupied was he with the effort to endure and conceal it, that he answered their visitor's greeting with merely mechanical civility, and then seated himself a little apart from the rest.

Sophia, however, was too engrossed with her lover to notice any one else very narrowly. And proud of him she looked, as indeed she might, for not only was he handsome, but the manly gentleness and serene self-possession of his bearing, and the kindness and good sense expressed in his countenance, showed him to be the Christian gentleman. Kynford, too, had often observed this, and was conscious that he himself lacked something which his unconscious rival possessed, and which fully justified Sophia's affection for him.

• Now, seated contentedly by the side of his lady-love, Wilmot prevented the continuation of his scolding which he perceived was imminent, by announcing his business at once.

"My dear, you must excuse me," he said, "for almost intruding now, but I have just left your uncle and it was his wish that I should call."

"Well, you are forgiven—by me at any rate! But on what special errand has my uncle sent you? Why has he not come himself?"

"Because he cannot either to-day, or—and what we shall do, I cannot tell—or, *to-morrow!*"

"A reprieve, a reprieve!" merrily cried Sophia. "He has to give me away, and now we must put off *the* day."

Wilmot looked as though he could scarcely refrain from kissing the saucy face before him there and then, though he answered, soberly enough, "But, my love, that is impossible."

"Mr. Coulson means that it is undesirable," slyly put in Melissa, whose presence had been almost forgotten. And then she blushed, wondering at her own audacity in daring to tease the minister.

He smiled. "You are right, Miss Deane; unless compelled by necessity, I will certainly not put off my marriage—no, not for a single day!"

"But *why* cannot my uncle come? I hope there is nothing the matter with him, Wilmot?"

"Nothing more serious than another attack of gout, which, after all, must be more trying to him than his absence can be to us. He is very sorry for our sakes, and puzzled where to find a substitute."

"Oh, that is soon settled," promptly affirmed Sophia. "Of course Kynford will supply his place; who should, if not my foster-brother?"

At this unexpected conclusion Kynford involuntarily started, and the hot blood surged to his brow. But instantly recovering himself, and feigning amusement—"I give you away, Sophy?" said he.

"Nonsense! I don't know how to. Wilmot, how do they go on? You have seen scores of times."

"My dear fellow; don't ask me! To see others, and go through it yourself, is quite a different matter. But your part will be very easy."

"Indeed! No; I can't do it, Sophy; I shall be sure to blunder. Look, I will go all over the city to ferret out some 'grave and reverend signior' to undertake the duty, but—give you away myself—don't ask me!"

"But, dear Kynford—brother," said Sophia, going up to him, "I would rather *you* gave me away than any one else—than even uncle. Besides, it will help us out of a difficulty, and you won't refuse my last request in the old home, I know?"

"You are done for, Wilmot," observed Kynford. "You'll never have a way of your own after to-morrow. Eve wheedled Adam, and now-a-days, when a woman once begins either crying or coaxing, a man must yield."

"Then you *will* give me away?" persisted the pleader, laying her hand upon Kynford's, and looking irresistibly pretty and persuasive.

"Well—yes; if I must, I must, I suppose," was the rather ungracious reply.

"Oh, thank you, thank you! It is so kind of you, because I know your dislike to figuring in public. What a good brother you are! There; now that is settled." And Sophia reseated herself with an air of much satisfaction.

"It will not be very dreadful," said Wilmot, encouragingly; "not half such an ordeal as mine—though the chapel will probably be crowded. Pity me to-morrow, Sophy, when I await you at the altar."

She did not reply to this observation, however, but varied the subject by saying, "It will be so nice, will it not, when we reach our new home? I quite long to set to work to help you in the school and classes." And her face brightened at the idea.

"Yes; I shall never feel single-handed again, but shall now always have some one to consult, to confide in, and to work for—though I cannot see how your mother will spare you. By-the-by, how is she to-day?"

"She will answer for herself," said Mrs. Stanley, who had entered unnoticed. "Thanks, Wilmot, but I will sit at the other window; pray do not disturb yourself. Melissa, will you kindly see if the blue chamber is ready for Mrs. Gow and Maria? They will arrive very shortly; and, my dear, will you ask cook if the jellies have set nicely? I believe all is arranged for to-morrow, Sophy."

"Everything now, mother; but it was not a little while ago." And Sophia told her of Mr. Josiah Stanley's illness, and of Kynford's having consented to supply his place at the coming ceremony.

"Oh dear, I am so sorry! I fear his health is quite breaking up, these attacks of gout are becoming so frequent."

"Yes; but he soon recovers from them, mother; no doubt he will be better in a few days. And what a comfort it must be to him that he has Kynford to rely upon now."

"It is; I do not know what we should do without him. See, you are wanted again, my boy! Will you go to my brother's? Tell him how much we all regret his sudden illness, and ascertain if there is anything you can do for him? There may be something he may wish to tell you—some directions to give, or——"

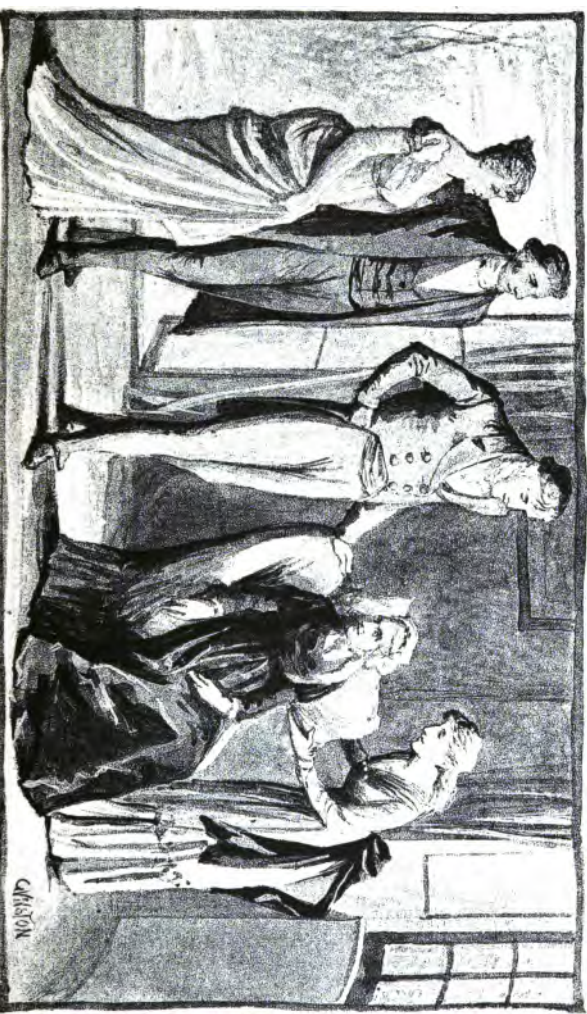
"I will go at once, mother. It is so hot indoors. I am just stifled: so good-bye for the present!" And Kynford stepped on to the verandah and was gone.

"How well he looks, to be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Stanley. "He has such a colour, and I was always proud of his dark eyes. He is, indeed, like a son to me—so kind and reliable."

We will now leave the occupants of the parlour, and follow Kynford, but—not into the city. Instinctively he turned his back upon that, and walking quickly towards the fields until he had reached the solitude and shade of an unfrequented lane, he threw himself beneath an ash tree, and strove to calm the strife in his heart. Yet all in vain.

"My love, my precious one, is going to morrow," he thought, "and as Wilmot's bride. Never can she now be mine, though I could almost die at her feet to win one look, one touch of the hand, one tender tone such as she gives him, often unconsciously. Oh,

"Yes, you are wanted again, my boy!"
 "I will go at once, mother."



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her gaiety, her careless ease when with me, almost madden me! She loves me, indeed, but as an angel might—with calm affection, with native compassion; for I am not good as Wilmot is. *I love her the best in earth or heaven!*

“Yes; to-morrow she will be gone, and I must live on in a house crowded with associations, all silently taunting me with my hopeless love. Chained and baited, how shall I endure my life here as it will be? Give her away? It is like tearing the heart out of my breast! To see Wilmot claim her is bad enough, but to give her to him myself—oh, Sophy, darling, little do you know what you have required of me!”

In a tumult of thoughts like these, hours passed like minutes, and the sky was tinged with sunset hues before Kynford could control his conflicting emotions. At length with wild eye and knitted brow, he sprang to his feet, muttering, “Well, I owe them all, and I will give them all. *I will do it.*”

Retracing his steps towards the city, he then saw Mr. Stanley, expressed proper concern for him, listened to the professional details and directions which he gave with mechanical intelligence, received his kind messages for his relatives, and at length left the house, although only to walk the streets until bed-time. At home all, of course, supposed that he had spent the whole time with the invalid, and as Mrs. Stanley had retired to rest he would not disturb her with conversation, but sent her a note giving an account of her brother-in-law.

Kynford himself, however, did not seek his pillow that night, but spent it, now sitting motionless, trying resolutely to confront the coming crisis and the dreary future, and anon, in pacing his chamber like a wild caged animal, with but one impulse uppermost—to break loose! For, indeed, his restless but repressed nature at last rose threateningly from its lair, fierce and tameless, panting to overleap all obstacles, and to rush for freedom. And though the man's stern will strove to cow it again into obedience, yet the thought of the morrow's climax of misery goaded him almost beyond endurance.

The morning broke bright and calm, lovely with the "bridal of earth and sky." Ere long there was a gentle bustle in the house, a slight flutter of excitement; and yet the pleasure expressed in every countenance was touched with pensiveness, for Sophia was beloved by all, and the partings sadden even a wedding. There is no rounded joy in this world.

Mrs. Gow, who was equally at home at marriage or funeral, made herself exceedingly and unobtrusively useful, and impressed the domestics, as usual, with a wholesome sense of her ubiquity; whilst Maria, as characteristically, put the finishing touches wherever needed, thus gaining much undeserved credit; though both mother and daughter-in-law were equally anxious to take the onus of the necessary preparations entirely from Mrs. Stanley. She and Melissa spent the early part of the morning with Sophia, who,

indeed, would scarcely let them out of her sight, now that the inevitable separation was so near. They, too, attired her in her bridal robes; but it was Melissa who fastened the ornaments on her wrists and bosom, and who placed the veil and wreath upon her head, for Mrs. Stanley's hands trembled too much to do so. Yet when, at length, Sophia stood up, beaming and blushing, in her white drapery, looking so young, fair, and good, the proud mother felt comforted at her own loss in her daughter's happiness.

"You make a bonny bride, my dear," she exclaimed, holding her forth, and then kissing her; "and I know you will make a good wife. I have had you long, and now must not begrudge you to another."

As for Melissa, she could not contain her admiration. "Oh, is she not beautiful, Mrs. Stanley? And won't Wilmot—Mr. Coulson, I mean—be proud of her! Come, you must see yourself, Miss Sophia!" And the excited girl led her friend unresistingly to the pier-glass.

Well, of course, Sophia surveyed herself, but she did so, if smilingly, yet quite critically also, and then quietly remarked, "Yes, I think I shall do; I believe Wilmot will be pleased with me. And, Lissie, remember that from this day forth I am Sophia, or Sophy, to you; for, you see, if you are to be a daughter to my mother, you will have to be a sister to me."

"Will you really let me be your sister?" asked Melissa, flushing with surprise and pleasure.

But it was Mrs. Stanley who replied, and she did so by folding the questioner in her arms, and saying: "You have been to me as a good child; I hope you will always confide in me as in a mother." And from that hour Melissa did.

Friends were now arriving fast, and, before repairing to the drawing-room, Mrs. Stanley inquired—"Have you seen Kynford yet, Lissie?"

"Yes; he was in the studio—of all places in the world! I saw him through the open door as I passed, and told him the time, for he had not then made his toilet, and his hair was so rough it made him look quite wild."

"How long since is that?"

"An hour ago; I had gone to bring you a cup of chocolate."

"I believe Kynford is as sorry as any one to lose you, Sophy. But he ought to be ready now; I shall want him to help me to entertain our guests."

"I will go and hasten him, mother. Besides, I wish to give him a word alone."

Kynford, however, was not in the studio, but in the summer-parlour, where Sophia found him, dressed for the occasion, and leaning against the mantelpiece with his gaze fixed on the carpet. Nor did he look up on her entrance.

"Why, brother!" exclaimed Sophia, as she advanced towards him, gaily, yet blushing with the conscious-

ness of her bridal array, "why, brother, you ought not to be here! All the company are now in the drawing-room, and you have to do the agreeable to the bridesmaids—four charming girls."

"Are they?" he said, just glancing at her. "And so you have missed me, Sophy?"

"Of course I have. Besides, I wanted one more word all to ourselves. I wanted to thank you for your constant kindness to me, and to repeat what I said long since, that you will always be quite as a brother to me. I know you are sorry to lose me—indeed, I never realized until now, how much I was loved"—and Sophia's voice trembled—"but be quite at ease about me, dear Kynford; I shall be very happy."

"May God grant it! And now"—coming forward and leading her to the window—"let me look at you."

She said nothing, but hung down her head in a pretty abashment as his eyes went eagerly, despairingly over her, taking in every detail of bright hair and ivory brow, drooping lashes and rising bloom, of heaving bosom and little hands—all her charms softened and increased by the pure white dress, and modest veil. Soon she lifted her eyes with a smile, "Do you like me?" she said.

"As much as this," he replied, folding her gently, but firmly, in his arms, and pressing his lips to hers.

She returned the kiss in a simple, sisterly way,

and did not even chide him for crushing her dress, which, however, she smoothed out, ere she remarked with smiling decision, "And now you had better join the company, Kynford, at once; you know mother is expecting you."

"How soon do you leave, Sophy?"

"In about half-an-hour."

"Half-an-hour? That's quick work!"

"Yes; so pray make haste." Then, pausing in the doorway, she added archly, "Brother, I hope you have been studying the service for matrimony, so as to know just your part in it."

Kynford started as though stung. "My part," he muttered, as Sophy vanished like a beautiful vision from his longing gaze; "yes, *my* part!" These words, simple as they were, made him realize his position suddenly and completely, whilst with Sophia's disappearance, her influence over him seemed as suddenly to cease. Then, too, the imperative call for immediate action roused his whole nature into its final protest of resistant agony, so that his mood changed from one of the deepest despondency to that of a mutinous excitement. He began to pace the room, restlessly, eagerly, with a hunted, baffled expression upon his passion-clouded brow, until, at length, after a pause of repressed agitation, his anguish involuntarily broke forth into words. "Oh God," he groaned, "this is *not to be borne*; this is torture! *Must* I endure it?"

As he spoke, his gaze fell on the open fields before

him, that stretched wide and level to the horizon, and the light of a sudden, strong, but wavering impulse flashed from his eyes. At this crisis a voice called him, a light step hastened near. Immediately he darted through the verandah, passed round to the back of the house, and walked rapidly away.





CHAPTER XVII.

MISSING.

THERE was a gentle rustling of dresses, and a low murmur of voices and rippling laughter in the drawing-room, where the bridesmaids, relatives, and more immediate friends of the family had assembled. They were every moment expecting the first carriage to take some of the party to the chapel, and when it drove up, a slight bustle ensued as Maria Gow and three other ladies rose to depart. But a few moments had elapsed, however, before Harriet Hales returned, and made her way quickly to the hostess.

"My dear Mrs. Stanley," she hurriedly exclaimed, "I thought I *must* come back and tell you! I met my brother Samuel downstairs, and he says that Sophia's Sunday-school children are going to strew her path with flowers, as she leaves the chapel—and she knows nothing about it. Won't it be delightful?"

"All are determined to make her sorry to leave

them, I believe," smilingly replied Mrs. Stanley, who had been chatting with some of the matrons of the party.

"Now, you will keep them waiting, Harriet," cried Mrs. Gow, as she came up to her from another part of the room.

"Dear me; what a hurry you are in for people to be married!" was the laughing answer. And the merry girl tripped away, her black eyes sparkling with fun and excitement.

"Weddings are certainly very interesting to ladies," remarked a youth with promising whiskers to Sybilla Gresham, the youngest and prettiest of the bridesmaids.

"Oh yes; I think they are so *touching*—and then, the dresses are lovely! I have just been up stairs to see Miss Stanley, and her veil and wreath are most *exquisite*. Do you know, I had been quite longing to be a bridesmaid, and it was so good of her to ask me. She is such a dear creature."

"It will not be long before *you* wear the veil and orange-blossoms, I am sure," gallantly responded the gentleman.

"Oh, Mr. Potts, how can you say such a thing! I am sure I would not leave papa and mamma for the world. Besides, it must be so trying for every one to be looking at you; I wonder how Miss Stanley will bear it?"

"She will be thinking so much of one, my dear," said Mrs. Gow, who turned up just at this moment

"that she will be little conscious of the presence of others, if I know her aright."

"Oh, yes; no doubt it is very absorbing," replied Sybilla, her gushingness suddenly congealing.

"Where is Kynford this morning, Mrs. Gow?" asked Mr. Potts. "I have not seen him yet. It will never do for him to be as late as this on his own wedding morning."

"No danger," interposed Paul Gow, who was standing by, and who perceived that the question troubled his mother, "no danger. I could not sleep all night before my wedding for fear that I should be behindhand the next day, and after all, I was at the chapel half an hour too soon. And then it seemed such ages to wait at the altar, that I fell into a cold perspiration, fearing Maria would be too late."

"You need not have feared *that*," quoth Mr. Potts.

"Oh, what a shame! You gentlemen are so sarcastic," cried Sybilla, fanning herself coquettishly.

This accusation Mr. Potts, of course, disowned, but evidently took it as a compliment, and contentedly petted the downy growth upon his cheek on the strength of it.

The company now began to thin; most of the gentlemen left; and the second carriage had just driven off with its fair occupants, when Melissa entered, and going up to Mrs. Stanley, spoke to her in a low tone.

She immediately rose, and retiring to an adjacent window-recess, whither she was followed by Melissa,

inquired of her "Can you not find him, my dear?"

"No, ma'am; and I have searched everywhere. I knocked at his chamber door too, and as it was half open and nobody answered, I just peeped in; no one was there."

"Dear me; it is very strange, and so awkward! The company, I can see, have noticed Kynford's absence; and you say that Sophia begins to fidget about it. Really, it is culpably thoughtless of him!"

"He did not seem at all well this morning," said Melissa, hesitatingly; "indeed, I fancied that he looked ill; but I did not like to mention it."

Mrs. Stanley became uneasy. She remembered how flushed Kynford's cheeks had been, and how bright his eyes during the last few days, and the possibility of his illness—and of its cause, too—now flashed upon her and filled her with apprehension. After a few moments' thought—"I will make inquiries about him," she said; "in the meanwhile, ask Mrs. Gow to remain here, and await me yourself in the library."

Melissa was kept sometime in suspense, and she was alarmed by Mrs. Stanley's pallor and unnatural calmness, when, upon entering the room, she prevented any questions by a gesture of the hand. "My dear," she said, "I am in sad trouble—Kynford has left us!"

At this announcement her listener felt both relieved and perplexed—relieved that it was so trivial a trouble, yet mystified why, if so trivial, it should produce the

effect of a calamity upon one by no means lightly moved. "Left you," she echoed; "then I suppose he is at the chapel! Is that all?"

"My child," said Mrs. Stanley, impressively, "I have ascertained that he is neither in the house, nor in the chapel—more, I have myself found a white glove—his glove—just beyond the meadow-wicket! One thing is certain; he will not even be present at the marriage; he will not, because he *cannot*, give Sophia away himself. I only hope he may return in time to wish her good-bye—and that I scarcely expect. Ah! I see you understand."

"Oh, Mrs. Stanley! I see it all now; so much that has puzzled me before. But, there is no time to lose; what must be done, and what *can* be said to Sophia?"

"She must know nothing. Some excuse must be devised; let there be no fuss—but ask Mrs. Gow about it, for I feel bewildered," and, with the feebleness of a re-action from excitement, Mrs. Stanley sank into the nearest chair. "Listen," she continued, "there are the last carriages at the door, and I must go to Sophia. Lissie, you go at once to the drawing-room: we must ask her cousin Paul to give her away; say that we will explain afterwards—but, he has not gone, I hope."

"No; he was to accompany his mother. Now, just stay one moment, please," and, without awaiting a reply, Melissa went into the dining-room adjoining, and quickly returned with a glass of wine, which she

offered the invalid. "Do drink it," she said, "or your pale face will frighten Sophia; it will betray you."

"Go—go," was the hurried answer; "and I will do as you wish."

Melissa accomplished her task well. Paul, indeed, looked astonished at her request, but, struck by her grave face, asked no questions. She then took Mrs. Gow into her confidence, and that lady at once taking in the situation, rapidly suggested hints of Kynford's supposed sudden indisposition to account for his absence from the approaching ceremony, both to the guests and to the bride.

The latter soon entering with her mother, who had now regained her natural manner and appearance, they were at once hurried into the waiting carriage together with Paul and Melissa, and quickly driven off. As they had but a short distance to go, there was but little time for Sophia's half-puzzled, half-alarmed inquiries concerning Kynford and his substitute, which Mrs. Stanley met, or parried, as well as she could—though not well enough, she perceived, from the sudden gravity that stole, like a shadow, over Sophia's previously happy face.

The remainder of the guests, consisting of two fat dowagers and Mrs. Gow, had preceded them, so that the servants—who were quite relieved to be out of the reach of her vigilant eye—had now some leisure for gossip, as they looked admiringly after the carriages, with their gay postillions and prancing steeds;

about equally divided between their ecstasy at the bride and the fine dresses, and their wonderment as to where "Mr. Kynford could be gone to." However, they finally concluded that he would "most likely turn up at the chapel, for he would never miss seeing Miss Sophia married—he *were* so fond of her!"

All passed off well during the ceremony. The bridesmaids looked charming, the matrons placidly pleased, Wilmot manly and happy, and Sophia calm, though pale and abstracted. But when, as she came from the chapel, leaning upon the arm of her husband, she found that she must pass through a lane of Sunday-school children, who pressed forward, baskets in hand, to scatter roses in her path, her face suddenly beamed with delight, and she bent joyously and graciously to the eager, happy girls; whilst a whisper from Wilmot brought the rich bloom to her cheek, and made her look, for the time, quite the ideal of a happy bride.

At the breakfast all strove to appear as cheerful and gay as the occasion required; but Kynford's strangely sudden "illness" caused a feeling of surprise and speculation in the minds of the guests, and his absence almost sickened the hearts of his friends with fear and forebodings. But, of course, the usual toasts were proposed, and the usual speeches made; and the gentlemen behaved with becoming gallantry to the ladies, who, in their turn, did their utmost to be lively, and to make everything pass off pleasantly.

At last it was over; and Sophia, in her pretty travelling costume, and with the strange new circlet of gold on her finger; was left alone with her mother to bid her a last farewell. They were in Mrs. Stanley's chamber, and for the first time were able to speak freely of what burdened their hearts. It was a sorrowful parting.

"Oh, mother, mother!" exclaimed Sophia, as the tears fell fast, "I fear I am leaving you in sad trouble—I do not know *how* to leave you! You say that Kynford has gone—where? when? What does it mean?"

"I cannot tell, my love. I only know that he *is* gone, and that we have been blind indeed not to have seen how matters stood."

"Then you imagine the same as myself. The thought haunted me even at the altar, when I believed him to be only indisposed. Poor Kynford! And what can be done, mother?"

"Do not over alarm yourself, my dear. He may return this evening—indeed, I feel as though it could not be otherwise. Should he not, I must then consult your uncle; he will be able to advise me. But do not look so distressed; for though there is little doubt Kynford loved you, and felt unable to witness your marriage with another, and, above all, to give you away, yet we have no reason to suspect that he will not return after your departure. Yes; I feel almost sure he will explain all to-night. It *must* be so!"

"You really think that he may? You do not fear that——" Sophia paled, and could not complete the sentence.

"No, Sophy, no; do not let that fear terrify you. Wherever Kynford may be he is alive; at any rate, he was perfectly sane this morning, and whilst sane his religious feeling—and it is strong, thank God!—will save him from what you have hinted at. And he is still in God's hands—remember that! Come, now, cheer up, my child: you must not let Wilmot see a tearful bride."

"And should he perceive that I have been crying, he knows that we are in trouble, and that I love my mother!"

"But now you must love your husband best. As for me, I have Lissie, you know; I have found her a great comfort this trying day, and can rely upon her to be so still."

First lightly tapping, Melissa entered to announce that the carriage was waiting.

"You must go, love," exclaimed Mrs. Stanley; "Lissie will accompany you downstairs. We will say *adieu* here—no, not that, but *au revoir*!"

Sophia embraced her mother hastily and passionately, and then, unable to speak, hurried away, followed by Melissa who looked gravely sympathetic; whilst, as the door closed upon them, Mrs. Stanley knelt by the bedside, and gave way to an outburst of tearful prayer.

The company, which had assembled in the hall,

new clustered in a flutter of affectionate admiration around the departing couple, who soon, amidst a confusion of handshaking, kissing, farewells, and good wishes, drove off *en route* for the Lakes, where they were to spend the honeymoon.





CHAPTER XVIII.

FREEDOM.



YNFORD, upon leaving the grounds, took the direction of the river, and, after half-an-hour's hurried walking, reached its banks, and followed its course, until a few miles from Linchester, when he gradually slackened his pace. At last he stopped to rest, and lifted his hat to allow the breeze to play around his temples, which throbbed with heat and excitement. And as he stood by the waterside alone and motionless, his past life—which he felt had been, for some years, one long consciousness of fettered faculties and masked misery—seemed to lie all behind, represented as it was by the distant city, now, to him, merely a place of captivity from which he had escaped. But he looked before him, and the wide expanse of level landscape, that stretched away into the dim distance, impressed him with a sudden and vivid sense of freedom; the lark's song, as the

blithe bird soared rapturously out of sight, thrilled him with hopefulness—it made joy appear *possible* ; and the river, as it glided onward, allured him with an irresistible fascination, for it led from slow anguish and daily drudgery. Yes ; the vagrant instincts of his nature, ruthless from repression, had, at length, become dominant, and the former master was now the slave. For he had dared to set himself a task in his own strength, and when he needed that strength the most, it had utterly failed him.

After walking till about four o'clock, Kynford began to feel exhausted, as much from the strain of excitement as from fatigue and fasting ; and he therefore threw himself beneath a tree, and was in a few moments fast asleep. Upon awaking he felt much refreshed, but bewildered as to where he was, and, that ascertained, as to what brought him there. With the consciousness of his position, practical matters forced themselves upon his attention, particularly as he felt exceedingly hungry. The sky, too, was reddened with the sunset, and upon consulting his watch, he found that it was eight o'clock ; and although, fortunately, his purse was well filled, it was necessary to obtain both food and lodging before nightfall. At present, he seemed far from town or village ; and he was ignorant of his locality, having instinctively avoided the high road or any beaten track.

Whilst thinking where to direct his steps, he perceived a coal barge coming down the canal, bound,

he knew, for Bowton, a small port; and he was immediately inspired with a definite plan at the thought of the sea. For, once upon that, he was not only safe from pursuit, but had the world before him.

His decision being made, as the barge drew near he hallooed to the men, and they brought it to the water's edge.

"You are going to Bowton, are you not? Can you take me?" he inquired of them.

"Yes; sartainly we could take you, sir; though it be pretty black; it don't look much fit for a gentleman," replied one of the men, who, if grimy, looked good-natured.

"Oh, that does not matter! I will pay you well."

"What d'ye say mate; shall we take him?"

"Aye, to be sure, Bill; it don't much matter what the freight be, so long as it pays well," replied Bill's comrade, who was sitting in the stern, smoking a pipe as black as himself.

"Always provided, Jim, it bain't a Jonah," retorted Bill, glancing suspiciously at Kynford.

He at once stepped in. "All right, my men," he said; "this part of your cargo will keep you in 'baccy' for many a week to come. Push out into the stream."

Jim eyed the new comer all over. "Well," he concluded aloud, "I see you be a gentleman, and I don't doubt you'll act like one—so here goes."

"Yours must be a pleasant life," observed Kynford as they floated smoothly on.

M^r As the bridge draws near,
 He halted to the men and wife.



"It's well enough in the summer, sir; though the barge seems a bit too tight sometimes; one wants to stretch one's legs; d'ye see? But there, work bain't play, and the bairns must have bread."

"And the men 'baccy," continued Jim, taking his clay from his mouth and giving a long whiff; "there be times when it's meat and drink both."

"Aye, I suppose so. How soon shall we reach Bowton do you think?"

"To-morrow, sir, at noon."

Kynford heard this with great satisfaction, for his whole nature was bent upon getting completely away. He was soon on very good terms with the bargemen, becoming really interested in them and in their mode of life, and finding in his new surroundings a strange sense of restfulness. They, on their part, liked him, and appreciated his shrewd questions and remarks; and Bill the junior confided to his mate that "the gentleman was one of the real sort, and no mistake." Whereupon Jim winked, and, spitting on deck, rejoined: "Aye, aye, he'll do; we'll see the colour of his money right enough. And though it's a rum go, his travelling like this 'ere, it ain't none of our bis'ness so long as he pays for his spree."

Kynford was very glad to share their humble fare and it tasted better than any of which he had partaken for many a week. His repast concluded, and the barge secured for the night, he stretched himself upon deck, and as the darkness deepened, and the stars brightened, and the night breeze stirred

the water into wavelets that rippled against the banks with a murmuring sound, he gradually fell asleep.

Early in the morning the barge continued its course, and before noon Kynford found they were nearing Bowton. Another mile, and he requested to be put on shore, after having handsomely paid the men. Proceeding to the town, he procured a suit of more ordinary appearance and greater usefulness than that he wore, which, with a few necessaries, he packed into a carpet bag, and afterwards dined at a small but respectable inn. Thence he went to the quay, and soon heard of a vessel, taking both cargo and passengers, about to set sail for London. In this he at once took his passage, longing to be fairly at sea, and believing that when once in the metropolis, all trace of him would be lost. His future career he would then consider.

For a time, Kynford felt quite happy in the novelty, bustle, and animation of the scene before him. All hands were busy in completing the storage of the cargo; the passengers were pacing the deck, enjoying the fresh, salt breezes; and as the good ship *Caroline* spread sail and left the harbour, our fugitive felt as free as the sea-gulls that fluttered, or floated, on the heaving waves; for he would not think of the past; he had leapt a gulf and would not look back.

The only female on board, besides the captain's wife and child, was a young girl, dressed in a dark

cloak and the large bonnet then generally worn. As she seemed to avoid Kynford, and as he had not seen her face, his curiosity was excited, and he determined to watch her, though cautiously and from a distance. After a while he saw the captain's pretty, curly-headed little daughter run up to the girl, who was looking seaward, and claim her attention by tugging at her dress. She turned quickly, took the child on her lap, and listened with a pleased smile to her prattle; whilst Kynford, advancing, stood silently by her side. Their eyes met, and he at least looked surprised—her gaze was cool and careless.

"Teresa, the gipsy!" he said, "and here! But did you not know me? I should have recognized you anywhere, and in any dress."

"Yes; I knew you," she calmly replied, "but I am alone: it is not my place to address young gentlemen."

"And how is that you *are* alone?"

"Sir, I told you that I was stolen by gipsies when a child. I have escaped from them! I have managed to give my keeper the slip—for the old woman you saw with me on Stixton Moor was that. She took all my earnings as a fortune-teller; but, after I had made up my mind to get away, I hid a part of them in the plaits of my hair—which is thick enough for such a purpose—and she would have found a hoard anywhere in my clothes. Lately, too, I allowed her to think that I would soon marry her son, and she therefore slackened her watchfulness—before this she had

long believed that I hated my mode of life, and she meant to keep me to it. I waited patiently ; I bided my time ; but it seemed as though there would never be a chance of escape. At last it came all at once. A day or two since, her son was taken up for theft, and she went into Linchester about it. I left the caravan at night ; walked far and fast ; was in Bowton this morning, and took my passage in this vessel. Now I am free—free !” And the girl’s brilliant eyes dilated, and flashed with exultant triumph.

“And what will you do when you arrive in London ?”

“I will try to get work ; I am young and strong and shall not starve. But no more fortune-telling for me—that belongs to my old life.”

“Why don’t you go home to your father and mother ?” suddenly inquired the child, who had been listening with wide-open eyes.

Teresa kissed the little questioner. “Because I have no home, Polly ; and do not remember my father and mother.

The child at this seemed thoughtful, and then—“You shall have *my* mammy ; I will go and ask her,” she cried, slipping from Teresa’s lap, and running towards the cabin. She was, however, rather hindered in her course by a grizzled old tar, who caught her up in his arms as she was passing him, kissed her, and demanded, “Where now, lassie ; what makes you in such a hurry to-day ?”

The little maiden looked with confiding blue eyes

into the speaker's seamed and weather-beaten face, pointed to Teresa, said something in eager tones, and then strove to be freed. Whereupon the sailor smiled, and put her gently down.

While this was passing, Kynford gazed at the Italian girl thoughtfully and compassionately, for the first time pitying her for her perilous beauty. How could she, without friends, references, or training in any occupation, obtain employment in the great city of London? Alas, what trials and temptations were before her!

He was about to question her farther as to her plans, when she prevented his speaking by expressing her own thoughts, as she apparently still dwelt upon Polly's question. "I was taken from home too early to be able distinctly to remember it," she said, "but I will make one for myself some day, sir. For years how I have *longed* for a home!" And she was again silent, gazing out upon the sea with eyes now soft and lustrous as the summer stars, and dreaming happy dreams of her future life.

Kynford turned hastily, and commenced pacing the deck, answering but briefly to the casual remarks addressed to him by the other passengers. He was no longer in a mood to talk. Home! The word rang in his ears. For the unexpected meeting with Teresa had recalled, not only his first interview with her on Stixton Moor, but, still more vividly, the compassionate and enthusiastic interest which Sophia had taken in her. And she was voluntarily leaving a life

of sin and temptation—he, one of duty and security.

Home! Could he look in upon his now, what would he see? The gentle invalid, who had been indeed a mother to him in all but kinship, prostrate with the sudden blow he had dealt her. Sophia, for whom he would readily have died, although by her husband's side, yet in tearful sadness and sickening suspense as to her foster-brother's fate. Then he pictured their distress when they had first missed him; the gloom of the bridal gathering; the wonderment and gossip of the townsfolk; Mrs. Stanley's increasing anxiety and grief as the hours went by bringing no tidings of the wanderer—it all flashed upon him, the suffering he had caused by his wild, selfish impulse to escape the necessary anguish which God, and not they, had appointed him. And, at last, the prodigal came to himself. He saw it all now. He had walked in his own proud strength; he had striven to endure rather than to resign; had murmured at God's will in withholding Sophia from him; and he had been compelled to learn that natural love and gratitude alone were not enough to sustain him in the utmost trial. No wonder Sophia had loved Wilmot better than himself, for they both loved their Maker even better than each other; whilst he had worshipped the human *only*. And verily, he loathed himself as he realized the sorrow he had wrought. Oh, he would hurry back as soon as possible, and then devote his life entirely to those of the only home he had ever known!

In this altered mood how Kynford chafed at the slow progress of the ship, which had for some time been nearly becalmed ! How anxiously he gazed at a sea looking like rippled molten silver ; at sails drooping listlessly in the torpid atmosphere ; and lastly, at an ominous reach of low, livid clouds brooding in the distance.

“ How long will it be before we get into port at this rate ? ” asked he of a sailor—Polly’s rough friend—who was passing at the moment.

“ Can’t say, sir,” was the cautious reply. “ But the saucy ‘ *Caroline* ’ will make up for lost time soon enough. I reckon there’s a storm brewing, sir ; ” and he pointed to the heavy horizon.

“ Well, anything rather than this lazy motion,” said Kynford.

The old man looked at him. “ Have you ever been to sea before, sir ? ”

“ No ; I have not.”

“ Then you have never seen a storm—I thought as much ! Ay, ay ; we’ll have wind enough in the sails soon,” he continued, as a sudden breeze woke up the waves, and fluttered the canvas above. “ See you how the sky scowls out yonder, darkening the waters. We shall have a wild night, sir—a wild night ! ”

Teresa, who had drawn near, and had heard these last words, looked somewhat anxiously at the speaker. “ There will be no danger, will there ? ” she asked.

“ No more than there always be at sea, my lass.

But don't ye be afeard ; she's a light, tight ship, and will float like a sea-bird atop o' the waves."

"You are old," said the girl, glancing at the tar's wrinkled face and grey hairs ; " why don't you stay at home and rest ? "

" Why, d'ye see, I never be at rest unless I be on the bound. I've been on the water since I were a little lad, and a ship be my proper home. I've lived, and I hope to die at sea."

" Ar'n't you afraid ? It must be so dreadful to be drowned—to sink in the dark depths ? "

" It ain't no darker there than in a sick room to dying eyes. We must all die somewhere, and I'd as soon be drowned as die in my bed—sooner, 'twould seem more nat'ral like."

" Everyone to their taste," drily observed Kynford ; " but, after all, God will choose for us, I suppose."

" Ay, ay, sir ; the Cap'en has settled all that above. So long as we be ready it don't much matter where, nor how, we drop into Eternity ! "

There was a fearlessness and a peace in the man's blue eyes as he uttered these words that impressed Kynford much, and, with a sudden curiosity, he somewhat shyly asked, " And you *are* ready, you think ? "

" I don't think nought about it—I know it, sir. I'm safe in the Saviour ; and if my last storm was to come this here night, to me it would only be the Lord in the ship bringing me to the haven at once. D'ye see sir ? "

" I can't say that I do, my man ; I wish I did."

"Then, sir—if I may speak so freely to a gentleman—if *you* wishes it you may be sure the *Lord* does. And if you feel that you be a sinner—and sinners we all be, rich and poor, gentle and simple—though it's a mighty humblin' doctrine!—why, then, you've only to believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart—that's it, sir—head belief alone ain't no use—and *you* are *saved*. There's no trouble can hurt you, and no storm can wreck you, when in Christ; for you cannot perish—none can pluck you from His hand. And when a man—or woman either, my lass—really believes in the Lord, they're bound to love Him, they can't help it! And why Christians be so afeard o' death I can't think, when it be the gate o' heaven, black on this side, but pure and bright on the other as the gate o' pearl we read on! But I beg yer pardon, sir, for spinnin' such a long yarn; it's when the heart's full the tongue's free!" And the old man touched his forehead and was moving off, when Kynford detained him.

"All right," he said, hurriedly; "but stay one moment. Are you sure that were you drowned to-night you would be in heaven ere your body had sunk to the bottom?"

"Most sure, sir; I would do very wrong to doubt it, since I've the Cap'en's own word for it. For, said He 'whosoever'—that's you and me, sir—'whosoever believeth in me shall never die.' And again, 'Where I am there shall ye be also.' And, of course, where the Lord is must be heaven. Take my advice, sir,

and never rest till you believe in the Saviour, and 'twill be the happiest day of your life."

Much interested, Kynford was about to ask more, when all further conversation was effectually prevented by a cry of—"All hands reef top-sails, ahoy!" and the old seaman hurried off to the performance of his duty. All was now bustle and noise on board, for a gale had sprung up, and both sea and sky had changed their aspect; the one wild with black, fast-spreading clouds, the other with tossing billows, upheaved and on-driven by the blast; the foam, as it flew from their surfy crests, looking, in the gathering gloom, like white beckoning hands from those beneath.

Most of the passengers had by this time gone below, and Kynford advised Teresa to do the same. But to this she objected. "Oh, sir," she said, "I feel safer near you. I know that you are good and kind, and I am lonely. If we should have a wild night, will you take care of me?"

There was a combination of womanly dignity and child-like simplicity in the speaker's manner that touched Kynford deeply; and, even had he known nothing of her, he could not have resisted such an appeal to his manhood. He drew nearer to her, so as to be better heard, and said, distinctly and earnestly, "Don't alarm yourself, Teresa, the storm will soon be over; and we have a good ship and crew and an open sea. But should there be danger, I will not leave you until it is past. And there is something else I

wish to tell you—that you are not without a home now—but it is in England, not in Italy; that you are not without friends—but they are my friends, to whom I shall return as soon as I can. Will you not let me take you to them?”

Teresa's face kindled into rapture, and she was about to respond with an eager affirmative, when she checked herself, remained thoughtfully silent for a few moments, and then spoke with some reserve of manner: “Sir, you are very kind; will you tell me where your friends live? I may, perhaps, go to them; if so, I go alone.”

“You do well to be cautious,” replied Kynford, “yet in this case caution is unnecessary, for I am true and trusty. It is the home I have just left to which you may return with me, and you will then be amongst friends who have already heard of you from me, and who earnestly desire to help you. As soon as I reach London I will correspond with them about you. I will show you their letters, and you will thus be convinced that I am not misleading you. But you must go below, or you will be drenched.”

Kynford's clear statement, and the calm sincerity of his manner, at once made their due impression upon the Italian's impulsive nature. With a quick movement towards him, she exclaimed, “Sir, I will dream of that home! is there a mother in it?”

“There is, Teresa; one gentle and good, whom all love.”

“Ah, how happy you are to have such a mother! I

wonder if my own is still alive? If so, do you think she could be found, sir?"

"That we will talk over with my friends—not many days hence, I trust. Meanwhile, live in hope of better times. And now you must indeed go to your berth, Teresa."

She gave him an earnest look, eloquent of gratitude, and silently obeyed his behest.

It had now become nearly dark, and Kynford was about to follow Teresa's example and go below also, when he was startled by a broad, vivid flash of lightning that momentarily lit up wild sea and sullen sky, and which was immediately followed by the solemn roll of thunder—its mightier voice prevailing over that of wind and water combined. For the first time in his life, it made him think of the trump of doom and of the day of judgment, and, although a brave man physically, and coolly courageous, yet now he quailed, for he felt that he was not in the path of duty, but in that of disobedience.

Had God's avenging angel, whose frown darkened the heavens, in the vast sweep of whose wings was the blast, and in whose pathway the waters were troubled — had he been sent forth to pursue the fugitive?

Kynford went to his berth ill at ease, wondering if indeed he were a Jonah, as the bargeman had surmised? Yet, when there he could not rest: the trampling of feet overhead, the hoarse cries of the sailors, the rattling of the cordage, the thud of the

waves against the ship, the constant howl of the tempest, all rendered sleep impossible.

And as he lay thus, in mental and physical discomfort, the contrast of his present surroundings with the home from which he had fled became increasingly vivid. He thought particularly of his foster-mother; he pictured her lying awake in the familiar chamber where, when a child, he had often prayed at her knee, now grieving over the fugitive; wondering where he could be, and earnestly beseeching God to shield him from harm, and to bring him back to her in safety. Oh, how he longed to be able to annihilate time and space, and to be with her again that he might entreat forgiveness for his ingratitude, his cruel cowardice, his unfaithfulness to her and to his Maker! It was when this yearning had become almost unbearable from its force of desire and impotence of fulfilment that he became aware of a strong, unusual, and hallowed influence, the consciousness of an invisible presence, of the pressure of another spirit upon his own, which it agonized, crushed, and conquered, until, utterly broken down, the strong man wept, and again and again groaned forth—"God be merciful—be merciful to me a sinner!" His whole soul went forth in that prayer of concentrated anguish—and it was answered.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This was the response flashed from heaven. And with the sudden influx of spiritual light that came with the old familiar words, Kynford both saw

and felt God's love to *himself* in the gift of the Saviour. Yes, the sinner's need, felt at last, was fully met by the Divine grace. Now he loved God and vowed obedience to Him with the determination of a powerful and penitent nature; now he knew that the sacrifice required of him in renouncing Sophia had been fully possible in the Divine strength; and the very stress of his grief for the past increased his gratitude for present pardon and peace. Now God's will had become his; and he prayed for strength to perform or to endure it, should not the threatening peril pass.

When calmer in mind—and happier, too, than ever before—Kynford's attention was again claimed by externals, and, consulting his watch, he found that it was nearly midnight. The storm seemed at its height, and the passengers had become thoroughly alarmed. All had risen and dressed themselves; and he saw by the night lamp many a pale and terror-stricken face. He, however, though a little uneasy, felt unable to stay below like a rat in a hole, and therefore made his way upon deck.

When there he found it very difficult to keep his footing, for the close-reefed vessel, driven in the gale, alternately plunged headlong into the depths between the high-heaved billows, and rose with straining hull to their foaming crests, helplessly tossed in the wild, tumultuous on-rush. The continued roar of the elements was deafening; and yet more impressive the sudden, silent, intermittent glare of the lightning that

showed them each other's faces, the little limits of the ship, and the boundless sea around, with its swift, successive surges, that seemed raging, hurrying, and clamouring to receive them in a thousand yawning gulfs.

Yet as Kynford, clinging to the bulwarks, viewed this scene, it awed rather than terrified him. For not only did he feel that he was in God's hands, but he also believed that either the storm would soon abate or the wind shift. At present, it was true, they were being driven towards a coast to be dreaded on account of its treacherous, shifting sandbanks; but as neither captain nor crew as yet showed much apprehension of danger, there seemed to be no reason why he should give way to what might, after all, be unnecessary alarm. Indeed, he was just considering the advisability of again going below, when he felt a light touch upon his shoulder—that of no hoarse, hurrying sailor, he knew, but of Teresa, who had ventured upon deck in search of her promised protector, and who had easily found him by the frequent gleams of the lightning. Kynford at once gave the trembling girl the support of his arm, and then—"Fear nothing," he cried; "I will take care of you!"

She clung to him with energy, and, favoured by a sudden lull of the wind, was able to make herself heard as she replied: "Oh, sir, I am not so much afraid of being drowned—I do not so much fear death, as what may come after it. For you know, sir, I have heard more of the devil than of God amongst my

companions, and I, too, have been wicked. From childhood I have lied and stolen—they would have beaten me if I hadn't—and I am not fit to die! Is God angry, do you think, that He sends this storm?"

Fain would Kynford have comforted and enlightened the poor, ignorant girl, who was, he felt, more sinned against than sinning. But, all too swiftly, there came what appeared to be an awful affirmative to her question. For, gathering strength from its previous pause, the blast suddenly bore down with redoubled fury upon the struggling ship, which bounded madly forward, and then quivered in every timber to a terrific shock. Its harsh and grating sound was quickly followed by wild, brief, despairing cries, as the heavy seas broke over her bows, swept away many of the crew, and with them—Kynford and Teresa! The *Caroline* had been driven upon a sandbank, and was immoveably fixed amidst a whirl of wild waters that dashed against her with tremendous force. Obviously she could not long resist their stress, and no boat could live amidst the breakers.

The panic-stricken passengers, who had rushed pell-mell upon the deck, appeared paralysed with terror as they perceived the hopelessness of their situation. A few, with some of the sailors, succeeded in taking refuge in the rigging, and thus gaining a short reprieve from death. But most of them, with many a shriek, were swept away, as the waves with incessant fury overleapt the deck and



M "The boat suddenly bore down with
 unrelenting fury upon the struggling ship."



threatened to break up the vessel ere long like a fragile toy. Indeed, so rapid and effectual was their action that in a few hours the tumult of wind and water was unpierced by human voice; and dark portions of wreck, blurring the snow-white foam, were all that remained of the ill-fated *Caroline*.

As the morning advanced the gale declined and ceased, and the summer sunbeams glittered upon a restless, but not raging, sea, save where the cruel breakers still seethed over the hidden bank where the good ship had struck. All hands lost!





CHAPTER XIX.

THE RECTOR.

EIGHT years have passed since Sophia's marriage, and Melissa is again in the old home at Castleton. The Deanes reside in the same house, and from their surroundings do not appear to have got on very wonderfully, though they are in more comfortable circumstances than at one time seemed possible. But what they lack in wealth is made up to them in contentment.

Mr. Deane, as he stands at the shop door on the particular afternoon of which I am writing, looks like a good-tempered, portly old gentleman—as indeed he is. He seems unusually happy, too, as he answers the greeting of Sam Wright—cobbler and local preacher—with beaming face and cheery voice. “A fine day, Sam! Good for your rheumatics, eh?”

“Ay; and more than that, Mr. Deane, this blessed sunshine brightens my experience most wonderful.

I have just been as far as the fields, and listening to the larks made me feel myself almost a child again. I wonder if getting so near heaven makes them little birds sing so joyous? What do you think, now?"

Mr. Deane seemed puzzled. "Well, I can't say that I have thought anything about it, Sam; but I suppose they sing so because they can't help it."

"That's it, sir, that's it; and so will we, once we're in heaven. How's the missus to-day?"

"Oh, my wife is better, of course. Mr. Ralph is coming by the next coach, you know."

"What, the Rector! I'm glad of it. The very thought of seeing him again will be heart's sunshine to his mother. Ah, he were a good lad, Mr. Deane, and a plucky one, and God has blessed him, and will yet, no doubt. I hear none but kind words of him from the townsfolk, and, though a Dissenter myself, I were as proud as his friends to hear how he had got on o' late."

"Thank you, Sam, thank you. And I'll tell you what—a good wife and dutiful bairns are better than all the gold in the world. There, I must be off. Good day, Sam." And Mr. Deane bustled down the street with a radiant face, stopping, however, to speak to many a townsman before he reached "The Green Dragon" hotel, where the coach was due.

We will not follow him though, but step into his home, and take a peep into the best parlour. It is not a large room, nor has it a charming prospect, as it merely overlooks the houses on the opposite side of

the narrow street, but it is as bright as it is home-like in appearance. In the recesses of the muslin-draped windows are stands of blooming flowers; on the green-stencilled walls are hung prints of George III., and the Royal Family, of Wellington and Napoleon, silhouettes of Mr. and Mrs. Deane, a large sampler worked by that lady when a child, and, lastly, conspicuous over the mantel-piece, the portraits in oil of Sophia and Melissa. The solid mahogany furniture is as bright as elbow-grease and oil can make it; the ponderous leather-bound tomes on the chiffonier, such as Dr. Johnson would have loved to handle, look learned and edifying; and the sofa most comfortably capacious. Yet the heavy appearance of books and furniture is relieved by gay cushions and fire-screens, which seem blooming into bouquets that vie with the roses and carnations in the vases. Then the tea-table looks irresistibly tempting, laid with the old Worcester china, and the dainties the Rector had liked when a boy—cheese cakes, tartlets and buttered currant cake, muffins, strawberries and cream, cherries, and the more substantial fare of fowl and ham for the hungry traveller. And what with the rich profusion of flowers, the ruddy fruit embedded in greenery, the glittering silver, the delicate freshness of the napery, and the bright, expectant faces of Mrs. Deane and her daughters, any one might know that a home-festival was about to be kept. Happiest of all festivals! who cannot remember one?

“The coach is late,” observed Mary, who was

standing at the window, anxiously looking down the street. "Ralph ought to have been here by this time."

"Nay; it is you who are impatient," said Melissa. "Time is proverbially steady, you know; he neither hastes nor lingers."

"He may not, but the coach may," retorted Mary, "and that is tiresome when one fears the tea may get cold. Will you have a cup now, mother? You look as though you needed it."

Mrs. Deane was leaning back in her easy chair with her knitting in her lap. The last twelve years had aged her much, for repressed, unshared, and therefore unlightened, anxiety tell forcibly on the frame. And though she had borne the brunt of family cares bravely and uncomplainingly, yet, when the late sunshine of increased prosperity at length brightened the home, her health suddenly gave way. A paralytic seizure laid her low, and from that time Mary, with quiet firmness, took her mother's place in the household, and insisted that she should henceforth regard herself as privileged and required to rest. Now Mrs. Deane smiles at her daughter's question, and replies, "Thank you, my dear; but I will have no tea until Ralph has come."

"No; or it would not taste right, would it, mother?"

"Hush, Lissie! *What* does Sally say?"

Melissa quietly opened the door, whereupon Sally was heard calling at the foot of the stairs, in excited tones, "They are coming; they are just here! I saw

them from the shop-door, and Mr. Ralph is as tall, and most as big as the master."

Mary forthwith vanished, to re-appear in a few moments with the best urn and tea-pot. "There," she exclaimed, placing them on the table, "the water is hissing hot—and I hear his step."

She had not time to say more, for up came Ralph, three stairs at once, and then the tall, dark-whiskered fellow went straight over to his mother—who had risen expectantly upon recognising his step—folded her to his breast, and kissed her fondly and reverently. She looked up to him with an expression of wondrous contentment in her eyes, but said nothing. Her heart was full, and she was ever slow of speech.

Then—"It is good to see the dear old mater again," cried Ralph, as he placed her in a chair. "It is worth coming many miles for! And how are Mary and Lissie?" giving each a brotherly embrace.

"If we are as good as we are well, we shall do," promptly replied Mary, "and so will you, Ralph, if you have increased in virtue as you have in stature since you first left home."

"Well, I have no desire to stand and grow taller." And he threw himself on the sofa, adding, "Come here, Lissie, and let me have a look at you. It is so long since I saw you last."

The invitation was not unneeded, for Melissa had hung back a little, awed by her brother, who, to her fancy, had grown up all at once; and shy, too, at the

long interval of time which seemed to separate them. For she had visited her home and seen Ralph but once during her residence at Linchester. He was then a slim young curate, and now she could not reconcile her brother and the "portly Rector" at all. However, it was her nature to obey, and she came forward as bidden, though with slightly drooping head and a wistful look.

Ralph eyed her, first critically, and then admiringly, "Well," he affirmed, "I did not know that I had such a pretty sister—that is, as far as I can see. Come; sit down by my side, and shake back your curls—that is it! And now you look as shy as Charlotte did when I put the question to her the other day—and about as knowing, too. And so you are home for good, dear?"

"Yes," said Mr. Deane, who had been standing by the door, a smiling spectator of the happy scene, but who now advanced. "Yes, our little Lissie"—placing his hand on her head—"is a fixture, she will never leave us again—we cannot spare her."

"There is no place like home, father," she replied looking up to him with clear, confiding eyes. "And I know this is the best home in all the world"

"Right you are, little sister! Mother, you have been expecting some one, I imagine, from the appearance of the table, upon which I perceive several substantial reminiscences of 'auld lang syne.' I have not lost my boyish appetite, and propose that we draw round the mahogany and discuss together the good

things before us and all that has happened in my absence."

Mrs. Deane smiled up into her son's face. "We will, Ralph, for I have been expecting some one a long while, and—the Rector has come at last!"

Ralph flushed as he met his mother's triumphant look; his blue eyes sparkled, and then they moistened. Proud and glad he was that he had fulfilled her cherished ambition, but might not her efforts to help him have shortened her days? No, no; that should not be! She should have the best advice, visit him in his future home, and be nursed and driven out in the carriage he was now able to keep. And, for the first time, Ralph was glad that his affianced bride was a woman of wealth. These were his thoughts, but he responded, gaily enough — "You expected the Rector, did you? Well, he has come. I hope you approve of him, and that is the last we will say about him. Yes, Mary, a little ham, please; it looks so tempting that I am sure it is home-cured."

"And how soon do you intend to be done for, Ralph—you are taken in already, you know," observed Mr. Deane, as he helped himself to a cheese-cake—he was a regular sweet-tooth.

"Well, father, I suppose mortals generally are done for when taken in, but, as yet, in this case, I find it a very delightful condition."

"Of course; we all know that 'where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise,'" slyly put in Melissa.

Ralph turned quickly to her. "How do *you* know?"

From experience, sage little sister?" But he had scarcely uttered the words than, perceiving his thoughtlessness, he could have bitten his tongue with vexation. For Melissa's vivid blush reminded him painfully that, if he were happy in satisfied affection, she was not, and that he had opposed, as strongly as any, her becoming engaged to Clement Jones—"only a lawyer's clerk!"

To the relief of both brother and sister, Mary interposed. "Ralph," she said abruptly, "do you intend me to die of curiosity?"

"I should be shocked to cause such a catastrophe, Mary, and will do my best to prevent it—if possible."

"I dare say you will; funerals are apt to interfere with weddings, you know. And so you have nothing to say of your lady-love?"

"I have plenty to say to her; will not that do instead? It seems not, and therefore I solemnly declare that she has just mother's fine eyes, and openly confess *that* was why I first fell in love with her."

"Nonsense, Ralph!" exclaimed Mrs. Deane, whilst the orbs mentioned sparkled with pleasure, and looked blacker and brighter than ever. "Nonsense! You have learnt how to flatter, that is certain; it is a symptom of your condition."

"Well done, old lady!" laughed her husband; "do you remember so well as that? Why, it is more than thirty years ago that I courted pretty Elizabeth Elliott!"

Mrs. Deane looked rather discomposed at being thus rallied on such a matter before her children, and gravely handed her husband the cake, with the purpose, we suppose, of giving him something better to do. He smiled and accepted the offered bribe.

"And when are you going to be married, Ralph?" urged Mary, as she refilled his cup; "you have not told us that yet."

"In two months, Mary; of course you and Lissie will be amongst the bridesmaids."

"We shall see; I suppose Charlotte has a very grand house."

"But she is not at all proud, Mary; she knows all about us, and is satisfied that she shall like my sisters."

"'Love me, love my dog,' I suppose—though no doubt she intends to like us; and I am sure, Ralph, you will have made a good choice."

After tea, whilst Mary superintended the washing up of the best china, Ralph appropriated Melissa to himself on the sofa, Mrs. Deane contenting herself by sitting where she could well see her son, though knitting away with her usual phlegmatically-calm expression.

"Lissie," began Ralph, "do you know that you are quite a stranger? And, besides that, I should hardly have known my little sister—she has lost her tongue!"

"Would you not? I thought you equally altered—"

though not in the same way!" And Melissa glanced slyly into the kind face looking down at her.

"Vague compliments are alarming, Lissie; I will not venture to investigate that one! But, seriously, it was most unfortunate that you were prevented by Mrs. Stanley's illness from coming when I was home last. And when you were visiting here I was unable to come. Though, I do think the good lady *might* have spared you; but employers are apt to be selfish—even the best."

"Oh, but I really could not leave *dear* Mrs Stanley (Mrs. Deane here looked earnestly at her daughter); you do not know how ill she was; and no one could do for her what I could, or be to her what I was!"

"Nay; why did not Mrs.— I forget her name—the daughter, come to nurse her?"

"That was impossible, Ralph; her baby was dangerously ill; but I am thankful to say it got better in time for her to see her mother before she died. Poor Sophy! she feels her loss bitterly; she was so fond of her mother."

"And how long has Mrs. Stanley been dead?"

"Only six weeks—it seems almost like yesterday! I shall never forget her, Ralph—never! She was like a second mother to me, and her home seemed mine. Oh, how happy I was at Linchester! I do miss my poor people, and they were so sorry when I wished them all 'good-bye'—as sorry, they said, as when Sophy left. But I knew that could not be; she was so clever, good, and beautiful; a ministering angel in

many a wretched home, in many a den of vice. Oh, Ralph!"—and in her enthusiasm Melissa lost her shyness and looked frankly at her brother, with a pretty, flushed earnestness—"oh, Ralph, how much good you will be able to do in your parish! Were I but fit for it, I should like to be a minister's or a clergyman's wife."

"What! are you not satisfied with being a clergyman's sister, then?"

"You are as wicked as ever; I am so glad. For I was afraid you would be rather—well, rather grown up and grave, you know."

"I hope I am the former; but I perceive I am not as formidable as I was an hour ago in some one's eyes. I shall always be the same brother to you, Lissie; only a kinder one, I trust, than I have been."

"When? You were always kind to me—you know you were!"

"I always meant to be, Lissie; but I was rather bigoted once, and unwilling for my sister to exercise the especial privilege of a Protestant, and the common right of all mankind ——"

"And womankind," interposed Mary, who had entered unnoticed; "because there is often such a difference made as to the rights of the sexes."

"The right of all human beings," continued Ralph, "to judge for themselves both what they shall believe of God, and in what way they shall worship Him. Though I still think that you are wrong theoretically, Lissie, believing, as I do, that in the Established

Church we possess a guarded freedom, and a simple and sublime ritual not to be found in any other."

"Ours is the only *true* Church, Ralph; you forget that."

"I hold, dear mother, that it is the best *type* of the true Church; but all are Christians, to whatever denomination they belong, who love and follow Christ; and, certainly, none like our little Lissie can be stray sheep from the fold."

"Then you do not mind my being a Methodist now?" timidly inquired his sister.

"Don't make me ashamed that ever I *did*! Now do you believe me?"

"You have made me so happy," she replied; "for I do not like to vex you all."

"Indeed, I think it is we who have vexed *you*," bluntly declared Mary. "But that is all over now, Lissie. You have stood to your colours and you have won the victory—at any rate, you have conquered *me*!" Then in a lower tone: "Ralph," she continued, "Lissie just made a Christian, I hope, of me—though I am none the less a churchwoman, mind. When I saw what she suffered for the sake of her convictions, it made me *think*. Did I love God as she did? Could I be meek under provocation, patient yet pertinacious, sweet and yet strong? No; I knew that I should have rebelled—I should, indeed, then, though not now, I hope—and I wondered what made the difference in us. I have learnt since, and have found your Saviour, Lissie!"

Mrs. Deane had put down her knitting and listened attentively to what was quite a long speech from Mary. She then spoke. "Ralph, I, too, have something to say, for it is not right that you should think your mother better than she is. Since Melissa's return, I have felt that I did wrong to exile my daughter from her natural home; and it was fitting that another should have the benefit, and I the loss, of her filial care for so long a time."

But Melissa could not bear this. She turned with an impetuous movement towards her mother, longing to come near and caress her, yet too awed by the habit of years to venture. "Oh, mother," she cried, in a grieved tone, "don't say so! No one ever took your place in my heart. I always loved you the best, and I believed that you cared for me even when most displeased."

Mrs. Deane's manner softened into sorrowfulness. "I did my daughter, I did; but, since my illness, God has shown me that there was pride as well as affection in my displeasure with you. And having wronged you it would be mean indeed not to own it. I will say more, Lissie; the way in which you prized your religion, and your obedience to us in all where that was not imperilled, made me value mine more, and at last persuaded me of the reality and reasonableness of your convictions. My dear, remember that you have my free and hearty consent to worship where and as you will!"

It wanted but little more to complete Melissa's

happiness, and that little was granted. She looked at her mother with wistful fondness, met a loving gaze, and then—how eagerly she sprang to her side.

“Kiss me, dear mother!” she entreated, “kiss me as you *used* to, and then I shall know that I am forgiven.” Nor did she plead in vain.

Ralph’s eyes looked suspiciously moist, but Mary—first clearing her throat, however, said somewhat bluffly, “there, now, that is all settled, and we are going to be happy together for ever—at least, Ralph means to be after his marriage, I’m sure.”

“Oh,” said Melissa, as she made herself cosy on an ottoman at her mother’s side, “how much pleasanter Ralph’s wedding will be than Sophy’s was!”

“A pretty selfish fellow that Kynford must have been!” said Ralph, indignantly. “It was thoroughly heartless conduct! If his absence were really necessary, surely he might have gone before the ceremony, and have given due notice of his intention—in fact, have acted in a rational Christian manner.”

“Yes, but Ralph, both Mrs. Stanley and Sophia believed that his conduct was not premeditated, but the result of an impulse when goaded almost to madness.”

“Dear me, Lissie,” said Mrs. Deane, “it must have come on very suddenly then! And you never mentioned in your letters that there was anything the matter with the young gentleman.”

“He was sane, mother, but they suppose that he acted upon a wild, despairing impulse. You see he

was secretly, but madly, in love with Sophy, who cared for him only as a brother, and had no idea that she was to him anything but a sister. Though afterwards she understood many little things which she had thought merely odd at the time. And, loving her as he did, it was hard for him to be compelled to give her away. Put yourself in his place, Ralph. Sophy never blamed him."

Ralph mused for a few moments, and then said: "Yes, Lissie, it would be a terrible trial for me to renounce Charlotte in favour of another, certainly; but, if it were for her happiness, I believe I could do it, and, by God's help, hide my trouble too."

"Well, Sophy could defend him better than I can, for I must say I never understood him. He seemed full of fun, and yet so reserved. And he was not good, like Sophy and her husband, I'm sure of that."

"And has he never been heard of since?"

"No; is it not strange! Poor Mrs. Stanley became ill from the shock of his sudden flight, and then pined after him. You see, she was always expecting him. 'He loved me so much, he will be sure to come back next week,' she would say; and then it became 'next month,' and at last 'next year.' In time she gave him up, believing that something had happened to him, or he would have returned long before. Bitterly she blamed herself, too, for having prevented him from following the bent of his nature in order to keep him with her. 'I was selfish,' she said, 'and I must



"Give me, dear mother! the extract,
this one as you went to."

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suffer for it—but, oh, Kynford, my boy, if I could but see you once more before I die!’”

“It must have been hard for her,” said Mrs. Deane, with a glance at her own son. “Yet she could scarcely have brought Mr. Kynford up in the way he should go, or he would not have turned out so unsatisfactorily.”

“I don’t know about that, mother,” demurred Mary. “You see he was not her own son, but evidently took after another family, and his grafted goodness—probably not much of it—did not master his roving instincts. In my opinion, it is a warning to good folk never to adopt ‘nobody’s child.’ Mr. Stanley was perfectly right in not wishing to do so.”

“Nay, Mary,” said Ralph, “you have not hit the right nail on the head, now. Mrs. Stanley was correct in her self-blame. For, had she permitted her foster-son to follow his inclination, and to become a soldier or a sailor—and in either army or navy he would have been a splendid fellow—not only would his constant companionship with Miss Stanley have been avoided, but the activity and daring of his nature would have found their proper outlet; whilst repressed, they avenged themselves on all. Depend upon it, if Mrs. Stanley had been less clinging and more unselfish in her affection, Kynford would have been a great comfort to her in her last days.”

“Provided he had been neither shot nor drowned—either of which would have been in the way of his profession,” said Mary. “However, it was a very odd

affair altogether, and it is my belief that no one will ever know the right of it on this side the grave. I suppose Sophia has got over it by this time, Lissie?"

"Yes; for she is so busy—and she never did take to fretting nicely. Though she always looks sad if his name is mentioned—which is very seldom, as I believe Mr. Coulson did not like him."

"I don't wonder at that," said Ralph, with emphasis. "And now—to change the subject—what an uncommonly nice looking young woman your servant is, mother. Has she any sisters? I should like to know, because Charlotte will be losing her maid; but with that exception she retains her old servants."

"Sally has neither sisters nor parents living, Ralph, but I dare say we can find a girl to suit—at any rate, I will make enquiries," said Mary.

"How Sally has improved," observed Melissa; "really I hardly knew her when I came home; She looks so bright and spruce, and yet so steady."

"She is a treasure," responded Mary, "both in the house and in the workroom. She is there now, or I could not well be here."

"And where is father?"

"In the shop of course, Ralph; Sally cannot be everywhere at the same time."

"Then I will join him there. How I shall relish a chat with him again!" And off Ralph went humming an old tune on the stairs, just as he used to when a lad, save that the former youthful treble was now exchanged for the man's deep bass.

"He is as much a boy as ever!" Melissa exclaimed, gleefully. "I am so glad! And he does not preach a bit."

"Not out of the pulpit, I should hope," replied her sister; "or his sermons would lose half their effect when in it. And now I must see to the apprentices." So Mary bustled off leaving Melissa and her mother to a quiet talk—how much enjoyed by both I need not say!

The next Sunday Mrs. Deane had the proud pleasure of hearing her son, for the first time, preach in the parish church of his native place. Yet as she gazed on his frank, benevolent face, felt the solemn reverence of his manner, and listened to his earnest discourse, there was, after all, more of thankfulness in her heart that her "boy" was a genuine Christian, than of exultation at his being the Rector of the important parish of Annersley, with its quaint, commodious old parsonage, and its ample glebe-land.

Ralph's wedding came off in the course of a few weeks, and of his relatives, Mary alone attended it as one of the bridesmaids. For Mrs. Deane could not spare Melissa. The strong-willed woman now liked to depend upon her gentle daughter, and she did so with a hearty trust and atoning fondness that made Lissie very happy. And as she, too, better understood her mother, deeply did she reverence her inflexible uprightness, her allegiance to duty, and her self-sacrificing, though silent, love. This reticence of nature she retained to the last, but her manner became more

genial and tender as she calmly and resolutely prepared to leave them. And long before she died, many stray, yet emphatic, words showed that she was now united to her daughters by the common bond of love to their God and Saviour and to hers.

As for Mr. Deane, he took quite happily to the new influence in the home; and his child-like faith especially sustained him when, after a lingering illness, the partner of his youth left him for a "lessening little while." And it was to the care of their youngest daughter that she earnestly commended him. "Never leave your father—and God bless you, my child!" were her last words to Melissa, who fulfilled the charge with absolute devotion, and never again thought of marriage.





CHAPTER XX.

MELISSA, "THE OLD LADY."



ANY years have elapsed since Ralph Deane left school, so full of hope and happiness, and all unconscious of the coming trouble. Castleton High Street is thronged, for it is market-day as well as Christmas Eve, and the holly-decked and brilliantly-lit shop-windows are filled with a tempting display of seasonable goods—the butcher's show of meat, though not charming in appearance, being equally attractive to the moving crowd. What a pleasant tumult of chatter and laughter there is, as well as of traffic; and above all, striking clear on the frosty air, ring out the merry Christmas-bells!

"Pity that the public-houses should be so full!" So thinks a lady—a stranger in the town—as upon passing into a quieter street, oaths, curses, and coarse laughter fall upon her ear through the open door of a tavern. From this side street she turns into another

consisting almost entirely of private residences—in fact, the West End of the little town—and entering a large chapel, proceeds to one of the class-rooms, which she finds empty. In a short time, however, a few more “sisters” drop in, and, as the leader is not present, an old lady with a bright, serene expression, proposes that they shall hold a prayer-meeting. And as the low, clear voices rose in earnest supplication, it seemed as though each pleader, in thus retiring from the world for a brief space, had nestled beneath the wings of the Almighty, sheltered awhile from present, and strengthened for future, trial. At the conclusion of the simple service, kindly greetings and good wishes were interchanged amongst the little group, and all left the chapel together. Most of them proceeded towards the business part of the town, but the old lady and the new-comer paired off in an opposite direction, and soon stopped at the door of a neat little house. The elder lady turned to her companion, “Will you come in and stay with me a little while?” she said, kindly; “I shall be so pleased with your company.”

“Thank you, I will; I think my husband and the bairns can spare me for an hour.” Accordingly, they entered, to find themselves in utter darkness, whereupon with a low, merry laugh, Melissa—for she it was—exclaimed, “Stay where you are, Mrs. Grey, and then you will not come to grief! I know my way, and will get a lamp. My little maid—Sally, junior, I call her, from her being the daughter of my old servant

Sally—will soon be in now. I have allowed her out for an hour to see the shop windows—gay enough, no doubt."

Before long the gas was lit in the parlour, Sally as smart and pretty as her mother, had returned, and Melissa and her guest were comfortably seated by the fire. Mrs. Grey, who looked delicate, drew a little nearer to it, exclaiming, "How very cold it is to-night!"

Instantly fresh logs were piled on. "You must have a glass of hot elder-wine, my dear," declared Melissa. And, in spite of protest, she went briskly to the chiffonier for decanter and glasses, rang the bell, and bade Sally warm the spicy beverage, and then earnestly pressed it upon her visitor. Afterwards she subsided into her American rocking-chair, folded her wrinkled white hands over her silk apron, and seemed quite to revel in the fire-blaze. "Now we have a real Christmas fire," she said, "as indeed we should to-night. We had a very happy time at class, had we not, although so few were there?"

"Oh, yes; and those dear Christmas bells seemed to help the prayers so?"

"I perceive you love this season; so do I. And I suppose we could not expect many out to-night—yet *you* are very regular at class, Mrs. Grey. I can already distinguish your voice there, for although I cannot see, I am quick of hearing."

"Oh, Miss Deane, surely you are not blind?"

"Yes, my dear; I have been so for some time now."

"Why, I could not have imagined it! You do not grope in the least, and know just where to find everything."

"In my own house; but I took your arm in coming from chapel."

Mrs. Grey looked compassionately at her. "I'm so sorry for you," she said softly.

"My dear, I am sorry for myself; it is a great trial in my old age, especially as all my relatives are dead. Yet I try both to say and to feel, 'God's will be done, and am quite satisfied that He knows what is best for me. After all, I am very happy.'" And the dear old lady looked so. "The fire wants stirring," she added quickly; "I can feel that it does."

"How do you like it poked? All about and all abroad, or shall I dash at it promiscuously, or only tickle its ribs? Do you know, I think a man might choose a wife as well from observing how girls stir the fire, as from how they pare their cheese."

"Poke it as you like, only make a blaze. Now, this is nice. I quite thought to spend Christmas Eve alone, instead of with a young friend."

"You have given me a cordial welcome, and that is so pleasant in a strange place."

"Well," replied Melissa, "and is it not pleasanter for me to have you here, than to be sitting alone, thinking of those who are gone?" Then, settling herself back in her chair she continued: "You see that likeness over the mantel-shelf, Mrs. Grey?"

"Yes: I have been looking at it; is it of some relation?"

"It is that of my brother Ralph. He was a clergyman, and so good! Every one loved him, as much in his native place as in his own parish—and he had but one from his marriage until his death."

"He resembles you in face, Miss Deane, very much."

"But he was far better—and very clever! He quite fought his own way up in the world, and as much by real hard work as by making friends."

"No doubt; but the one lessens the other, though," laughed Mrs. Grey; "and I consider that *I* have made a good beginning to-night."

Melissa smiled. "Ah, but we *all* had to work hard, my dear, for when I was quite a girl my father failed through becoming responsible for another. It was a great trouble at the time, but in the end we were as happy, if not as prosperous, as before."

"I daresay; wealth cannot make happiness, although it may increase it."

"And I think the happiest time of my life," continued Melissa, musingly, "was when my parents became reconciled to my change of religion. But I shall tire you I fear, you will think me a garrulous old woman."

"Please go on, Miss Deane; I like to hear you talk."

"And old folk like to talk of the old times, and so I *will* go on, my dear. I daresay you have not heard

that I was brought up as a strict Churchwoman. Well, I heard the Methodists abused, and of course that excited my curiosity to know something of them for myself, the upshot of which was, not only my conversion, but the resolution to become one of those despised people. I had to leave my home ultimately in consequence of this, but the Lord raised me up friends whose home became as my own. And I love to think of my life at Linchester! Ah, in those days, I was as busy as a bee, and blithe as a bird! Yet I had one heavy trial whilst there: though I learnt years afterwards that the gentleman I had felt it right to refuse had become married to Mattie Houghton, an old friend of mine, and that they led each other a miserable life; he being miserly, she extravagant, and both worldly."

"How fortunate it was that you did refuse him, Miss Deane! I am sure you are much happier as you are."

"I am, thank God; I can see now it was all for the best! And yet—my dear, be thankful that you are blessed with husband and children, for, should you be spared to be my age, you will not then feel as I do sometimes, like the last leaf upon the tree. But that is only now and then, when I feel a bit lonely in my darkness; and at these times the Lord hears me as I am bowed in prayer, and cheers me—just as he did my sister Mary through her long illness."

"I like the name Mary. Do you know what a gentleman—a bachelor, of course—once told me?

That people should choose pretty names for their children, and bring them up accordingly."

"Well, Mary suited my sister, for she was a good, sensible woman; a very quiet Christian; she let her actions speak. And she died so beautifully! She heard the angel's music, my dear, and wondered that we could not also. And since I have been blind it seems as if there were but a door between us—that, too, an open one. I often think that the dear ones pass through it and stand beside me. Yes; I shall soon *see* them again, I know!" And Melissa raised her sightless eyes as though she had a happy vision, with so heavenly a peace upon her brow, so calm a smile upon her lips, that her young friend could not but love her.

"And you never regretted your change of opinion?" she asked quietly.

"It was scarcely a change" said Melissa, coming out of her brief reverie, "for before, I had no opinions—I merely believed what I had been taught. The Methodist preaching reached my heart, and enabled me to give it to God. And from the hour that I trusted in Him He has kept me in peace—and will to the end. But surely you are not going already? It is quite early yet."

"I must leave now, indeed," said Mrs. Grey, who had risen. "It has just struck eight o'clock, and I have the Christmas Tree to deck for the bairns yet."

Melissa's face brightened. "Then come with me into the kitchen; I have some spice-cakes there.

Will you take this to the children, and say it is from one who loves them? Bless their dear hearts; I love all little children!"

"How kind you are! And they will be so mystified and delighted. I will return the basket in a day or two."

"Yes, come again as soon as you can," said Melissa, as she stood with her guest at the front door, "and a 'Merry Christmas' to you."


"A happy one to you! Now that I have been here once I shall know my way again, depend upon it; I was sure I should like you when I first saw you."

Then, giving her new friend an impulsive kiss, Mrs. Grey walked briskly off, whilst Melissa smiling placidly, returned to her quiet parlour, there to muse upon old times, and to recall old familiar faces, until the distant chiming of the Christmas Bells lulled her to sleep.

THE END.

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